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Il giardino dei sospiri

Magdalena Kožená

COLLEGIUM 1704 · VÁCLAV LUKS

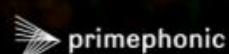
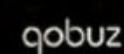
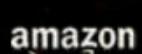
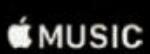


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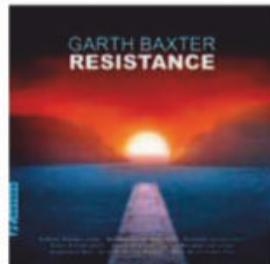


A special eight-page section focusing on the musical scene in the US and Canada

Baxter

'Resistance'

Ballade for a Princess^a. Could You Dream What I Dream^b. Des larmes encadrées^c. Edgefield^d. From the Headwaters^e. Il y a longtemps^b. MacPherson's Lament^f. Resistance^a. Romance Without Words^a. The Silver Run^g
^gMelissa Wertheimer fl/c Kenny Baik sax
^bNicholas Currie vn ^bDiana Greene, c Bonghee Lee, ^{ag}Andrew Stewart pf f Azimuth Quartet;
^dArabesque Guitar Duo; ^eWest Shore Piano Trio
Navona Ⓜ NV6202 (77' • DDD)



Laurence Vittes, in his review of Garth Baxter's songs 'Ask the Moon' (5/18), rightly categorised his idiom as 'simple, straightforward, old-fashioned romantic'. Here the focus is on chamber and instrumental works, although three – the violin-and-piano duets *Could You Dream What I Dream* and *Il y a longtemps*, plus the piano solo *Romance Without Words* – all derive from his two-act opera *Lily*.

So far as I can determine, the works are of relatively recent provenance, although no dates – or, indeed, useful information – are provided (Navona's skimpy documentation, even on their website, remains a recurrent niggle). The composer's website does provide background information but no dates of composition aside from – of the works featured here – *Romance Without Words* being premiered in 2011 and the guitar duo *Edgefield* three years later. Even his opera, which has its own website(!), gives no dates.

These 10 works provide a rounded picture of what Baxter (b1946) is about as a composer. Full of charm and melody, each is a miniature tone picture or character study (none runs to 10 minutes, the shortest barely past five), with little abstract compositional rigour. Sometimes the music takes rather saccharine turns, as in the 'Lily' pieces; several others have a feeling of popular light jazz about them. The most musically satisfying are the title-track, *Resistance*, and *Ballade for a Princess*, both expertly rendered by Andrew Stewart, who accompanies

GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

David Korevaar

The renowned pianist talks about his discovery of a little-known Italian composer

How did you come across Luigi Perrachio?

When I first came to the University of Colorado, 18 years ago, I became aware of a collection of scores in our library that had belonged to Ricardo Viñes, full of obscure music. I went through all 800-odd scores, and found several worthy of study, including Perrachio's *Nove Poemetti*. I eventually had time to learn these pieces, and after further investigation I also fell in love with the 25 *Preludi*. With no one else playing this music, I am excited to be able to introduce it in this recording as well as in live performances.

Is it simplistic to think of the style of this music as a kind of Italian Impressionism?

The *Poemetti* certainly fit in with an 'Impressionist' aesthetic, and were clearly written under the influence of Ravel and Debussy, albeit with an Italianate twist. Other Italians were dabbling in this style (see the early piano music of Mario Castelnuovo-



Tedesco, for example). That said, the *Preludi* hardly fit that mould, with their far cleaner textures and relatively spare sound.

Is this music within reach of the amateur?

Some of the pieces are definitely in reach, especially in the *Preludi*. Although everything is out of print, the *Poemetti* are available through the University of Colorado library and the *Preludi* are held by several libraries.

Might you record a second volume?

There probably isn't enough for a second disc. There is a piano concerto (unpublished) that I am curious about, as well as a piano quintet and the first violin sonata, both from the 1910s.

Melissa Wertheimer in the diptych *The Silver Run*, as well as the piano trio *From the Headwaters*. I did not warm much to violinist Nicholas Currie's rather edgy intonation in the duos (less problematic in the performance by the Azimuth Quartet – of which he is leader – of *MacPherson's Lament*); otherwise the performances, recorded at five different locations on nine different dates during 2015–18, are captivating and the finished sound remarkably consistent. **Guy Rickards**

Mahler

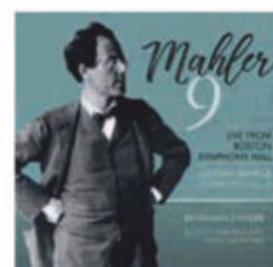
Symphony No 9

Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra /

Benjamin Zander

Brattle Media Ⓜ ② 731717 804826 (86' • DDD)

Recorded live at Symphony Hall, Boston, 11 March 2018

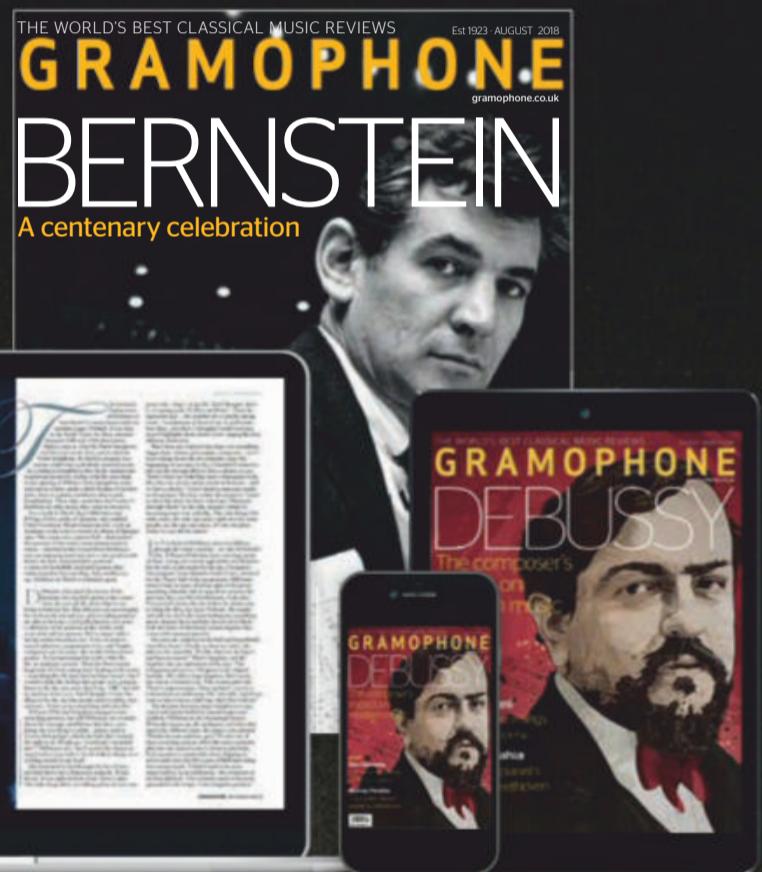


Benjamin Zander's detailed immersion in both the letter and the spirit of Mahler's Ninth Symphony yielded a generally excellent live recording with the Philharmonia Orchestra (Telarc, 4/99), now out of print. None of Zander's subsequent Philharmonia Mahler recordings lived up to that Ninth's promise but this 2018 live remake with the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra recaptures the Philharmonia recording's salient

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Pictured: Violinist Janine Jansen (DECCA / © Marco Borggreve) who featured on the January 2016 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$142.87; print only annual subscription or Digital Edition or Reviews Database (\$101); Digital Club (\$134); Gramophone Club (\$167). If choosing a print option, an additional overseas P+P charge will be added at \$35.75 (Outside EU). If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com



qualities, and with superior engineering to boot. Zander carefully organises the first movement's intricate contrapuntal strands and minutely scaled dynamic indications to the point where the climaxes shatter without becoming diffuse. Mahler's signature stopped-horns passages are characterised with colourful versatility, as are the hushed string conversations at around 16 minutes into the movement. Granted, you don't get Bernstein's volatility or the impeccable sectional alignment and upward sweep of Alan Gilbert's stunning Stockholm recording, yet Zander clearly knows what he wants to bring out.

He begins the second movement's first Ländler theme deliberately, then picks up the pace at bar 10 (it takes a few seconds for the musicians to adjust and lock in), and keeps listeners in suspense by the way he calibrates the soft dynamics. By contrast, the 'drunken waltz' episodes are convivial rather than fierce, lacking the sardonic cutting edge associated with Ančerl and Chailly. Similar observations apply to the 'Rondo-Burleske'. The clarity of instrumental detail often beggars belief, yet one misses the nimble ensemble attacks and releases that distinguish Karajan's live Berlin version or the coda's cataclysmic power in the first and finer of the late Michael Gielen's two recordings.

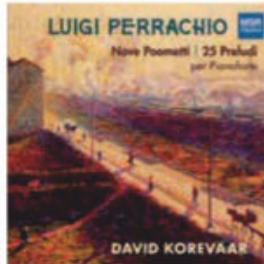
Zander and his Boston musicians find their expressive centre with their touchingly controlled finale. Listen to the string section's pinpoint unanimity of phrasing and timbre throughout, and you'll easily mistake these young musicians for seasoned veterans. Given that Mahler's Ninth is one of the luckiest symphonies in terms of reference versions, Zander inevitably faces stiff competition, yet the outer movements alone are worth the price of admission and the attention of anyone who loves this extraordinary work. **Jed Distler**

Perrachio

Nove Poemetti. 25 Preludi

David Korevaar pf

MSR Classics (F) MS1710 (68' • DDD)



Luigi Perrachio (1883-1966) was born in Turin, where from 1925 he taught piano and later composition at the Conservatorio. As a youth, however, he spent time in Paris, and he returned to his native city as a new-music champion. Loath to promote himself, Perrachio's music mostly



War to Peace: violinist Betül Soykan plays works associated with the Second World War - see review on page VI

languished in obscurity and only a handful of pieces were published in his lifetime. Indeed, none of the piano works on this disc had been recorded before David Korevaar wrapped his enterprising and skilful hands around them, lavishing the utmost in loving care upon each and every piece.

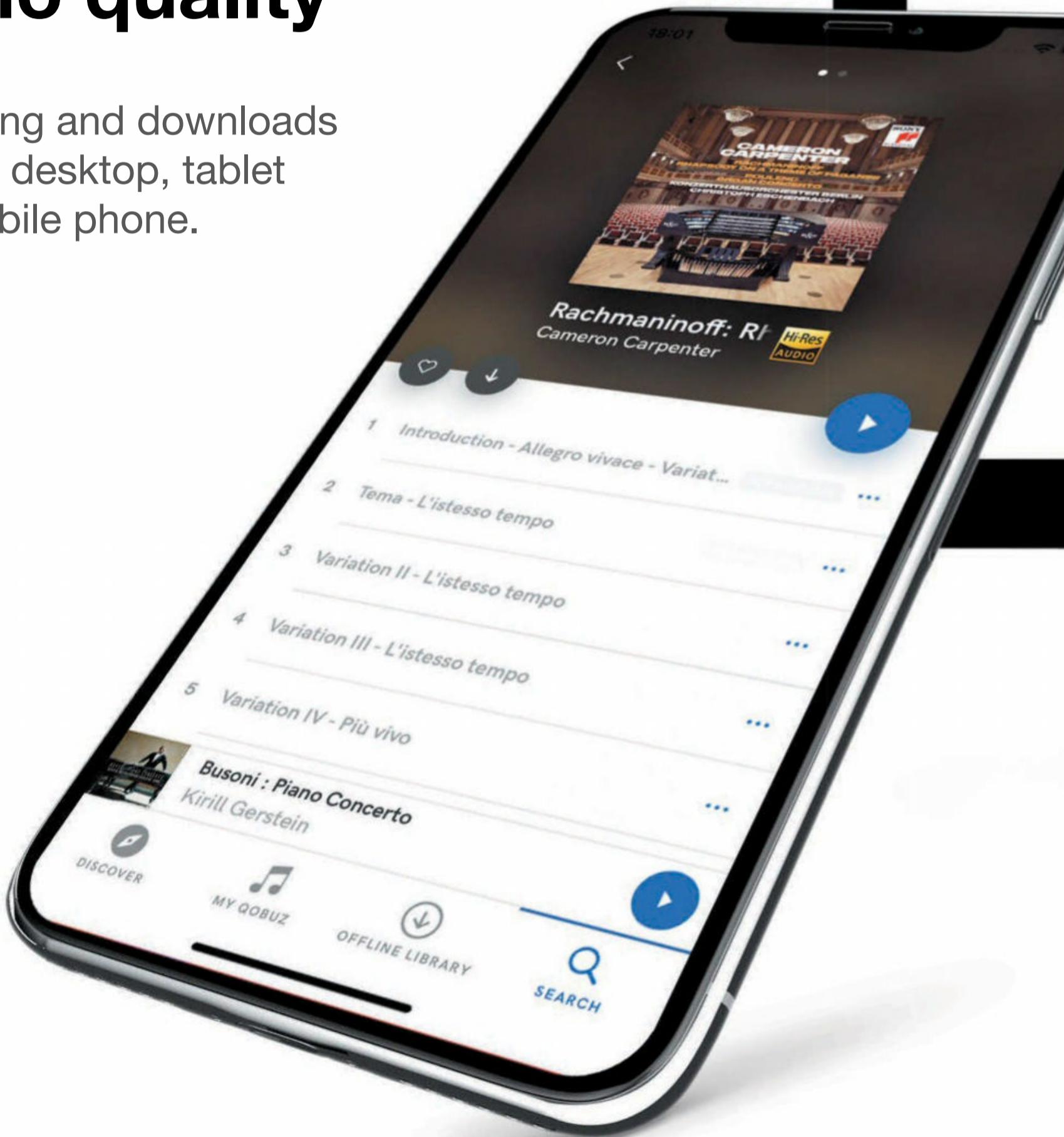
So what is the music like? Think of the gestural atmosphere in Debussy's *Préludes* Book 2 as if Scriabin wielded an editorial hand, be it the moody opening 'Sera' or the subsequent flickering character piece 'Zefiro'. 'La notte dei morti' isn't quite as foreboding as its title suggests, although the long lines phrased in subtle washes of pedal evoke a submerged underworld. The ostinato patterns and flourishes of 'Pioggia' may superficially recall Debussy's 'Jardins sous le pluie' from *Estampes*, yet Perrachio's showers and cloudbursts pursue original and unexpected routes. Similarly, the

concluding 'Mare' paints aural pictures of ocean waves whose harmonic and rhythmic motion keeps the listener guessing, even foreshadowing John Adams's 1977 *Phrygian Gates* for a second or two.

As Korevaar rightly suggests in his superb booklet notes, the 25 Preludes are cut from terser, harder-hitting and more neoclassical cloth. No 3, for example, pits ascending left-hand bass lines against declamatory right-hand dotted rhythms: Mussorgsky's 'Bydło' meets the first movement of Shostakovich's not-yet-written Fifth Symphony, perhaps? A repeated high-register motif provides the glue to No 5's airy whimsy, while No 7 is a sombre study in quasi-processional chords that build to a surprising yet inevitably intense climax. No 9's insistent fifths in the bass and folksy yet thick right-hand chords might sound charming if played softer and lighter, but that's not what the composer

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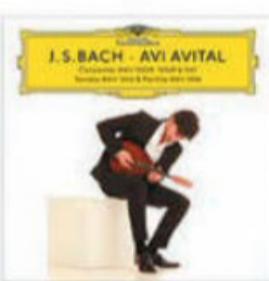


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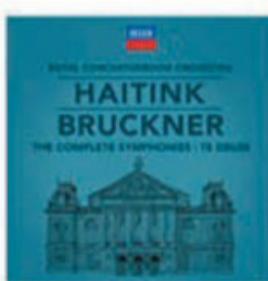
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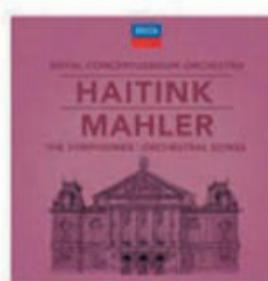
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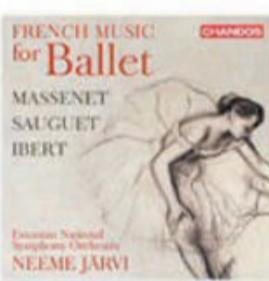
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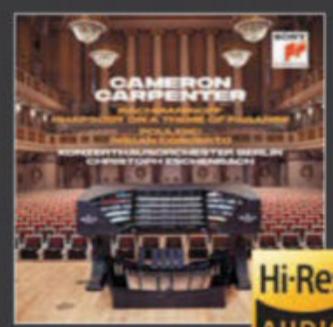
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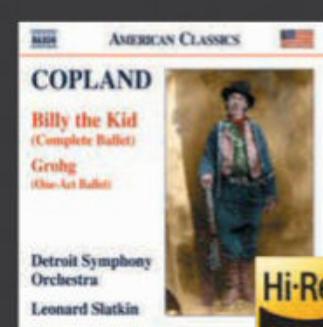
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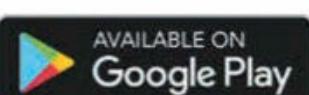
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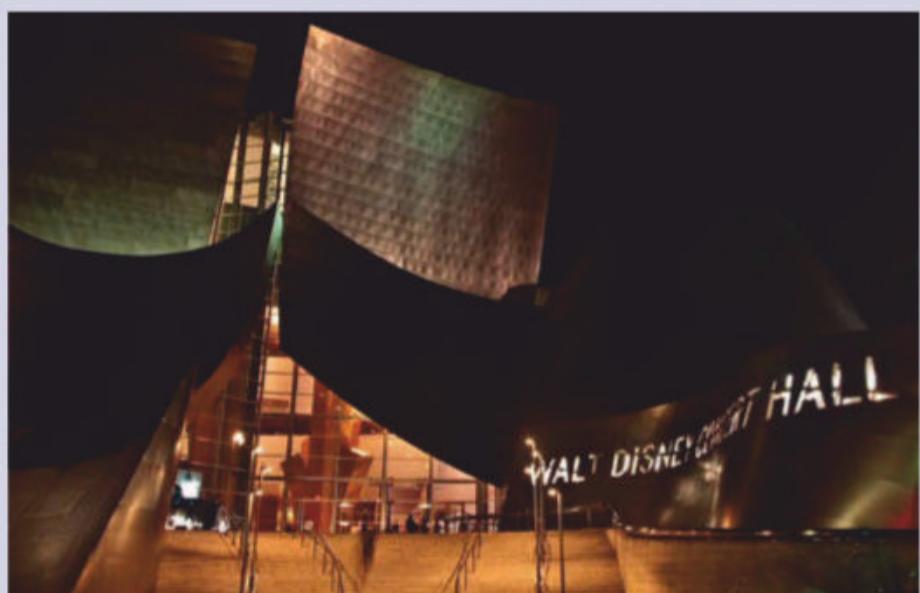
Resident ensemble Los Angeles Philharmonic

Since Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic opened Walt Disney Concert Hall on October 24, 2003, with Beethoven, Mozart and his own *Wing on Wing*, the Frank Gehry-designed hall has reigned as the pre-eminent jewel in Los Angeles's cultural crown.

Surrounded by two major contemporary art museums (MOCA and The Broad) and across the street from the prestigious Colburn School, WDCH represents the cultural diversification and aspirations of the city both in repertoire and audience, and gives its orchestra a hall that was designed specifically for their virtuoso, Technicolor playing. As Salonen said: 'Everyone can now hear what the LA Phil is supposed to sound like.'

In contrast to the exhilarating stainless steel exterior, the main auditorium is a masterpiece of architectural woodwork, further highlighted by the spectacular curved wooden pipes of the Glatter-Götz organ's facade, which were also designed by hometown hero Gehry. Other attractions on WDCH's grounds include the REDCAT multimedia arts centre, an Ira Gershwin library and a rooftop garden. Be sure not to miss wandering up and around the unfurled sails for breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains.

Designed as an audiophile showcase, the auditorium offers high impact, laser-sharp sound and unobstructed views from every one of its 2265 seats. The seats facing the orchestra provide the best traditional sound; those in the wraparound seats facing the



conductor get the most intimate experience. The hall was on full display for Dudamel's recent performances of Tan Dun's *Buddha Passion*, with its blend of music, song, dance and a Cirque du Soleil *joie de vivre*, and the world premiere of John Adams's *Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?* with Yuja Wang wrapped in green cellophane; both captured the kind of brilliant theatrical experiences that are sweeping up young, hip, Hollywood-type audiences. You can also hear the tangible excitement of WDCH on new live recordings: the premiere recording of Salonen's Cello Concerto with Yo-Yo Ma (Sony – see page 48) and Dudamel's 'Celebrating John Williams' (DG).

It is now more than 20 years since Walt Disney's widow Lillian gave \$50 million to build a performance venue as a gift to the people of Los Angeles. It has turned out to be a gift that continues to give.

Laurence Vittes

intended (unfortunately!). However, No 10 is an oddly beguiling tarantella-like study featuring murmuring rolled left-hand chords and a rapid, soft, repeated-note melody in the right hand. The penultimate prelude mixes Respighian modality with full-bodied Schumann-esque angularity and is followed by a triple-metre study that impressively showcases Korevaar's fleet and supple fingers and seemingly concludes in mid-air.

Kudos to David Korevaar for bringing Perrachio's inventive and pianistically resourceful piano music to light and playing it so wonderfully well. Excellent sound, although loud passages take on a slightly metallic stridency that you never hear from Korevaar in concert. **Jed Distler**

‘War to Peace’

‘World War II and Holocaust Inspired Sonatas’

Ferguson Violin Sonata No 2 **Prokofiev** Violin Sonata No 1, Op 80 **Messiaen** Quatuor pour la fin du temps - Louange à l'immortalité de Jésus

Betül Soykan vn **Juan Pablo Andrade** pf
Centaur © CRC3666 (58' • DDD)



The subtitle of this disc, ‘World War II and Holocaust Inspired Sonatas’, raises a question: in what way were any of these inspired specifically by the Holocaust? Prokofiev's First Sonata (wrongly assigned Op 53 on the back cover but correctly as Op 80 in the booklet text) was begun in 1938 but set aside and not completed until eight years later. Its dark, minatory tone – in which he comes close to Shostakovich – more likely reflects the toxic era of the pre-war Stalinist purges. Perhaps the Holocaust induced him to pick it up again; but his famous remark of one passage sounding like ‘a wind through a graveyard’ is unlikely for the victims of Nazi charnel houses.

Howard Ferguson's fine Second Sonata was also completed in 1946, after his work with Myra Hess in presenting the wartime

concerts in London was done. His music's vigour and ferocity suggest the release from a burden rather than outrage at the Holocaust. Messiaen's ‘Praise to the Immortality of Jesus’ was at least written in a camp, although Stalag VIII-A was for POWs, not a concentration camp – another documentation error. The finale to the *Quartet for the End of Time* of 1940–41, it therefore (just) predates the Final Solution and is in any event a transcription of the second part of the organ *Diptyque* of 1930.

What of the performances? I like Betül Soykan's clear tone and crisp phrasing, and Juan Pablo Andrade is, on the whole, a sympathetic accompanist. However, the Prokofiev does not hang together and the *Allegro brusco* is leaden – among modern interpreters, Repin and Berezovsky (Erato, 1/96) and Ibragimova and Osborne (Hyperion, 8/14) are much to be preferred. The Ferguson is very nicely done but there are finer accounts available, not least from Mordkovitch and Benson (Chandos). Bright, clear sound. **Guy Rickards**



A LETTER FROM *Washington*

A new series explores music-making around North America, starting with Patrick Rucker in the US capital



Years ago a friend, describing his childhood as a choirboy at National Cathedral in 1930s Washington, told me, 'for culture, we had to go to Baltimore'. Of course the District of Columbia is not New York. But a lot has changed since those pre-war days when Washington's musical offerings seemed meagre for the capital of the US. Today, with a metropolitan area of well over six million, DC is a national artistic hub with deep roots in a cultural milieu that thrives on diversity.

Washingtonians have easy access to two major orchestras: the National Symphony, in residence at the Kennedy Center, and the Baltimore Symphony, regularly performing at the Strathmore Performing Arts Center.

In November the BSO and music director Marin Alsop presented an all-American programme including new music by Mason Bates and Kevin Puts, with Copland's Third Symphony. Bates's *Mothership* showcased full orchestra, amplified electronic sounds and on-the-spot improvisations with luminous textures and vibrant rhythms. Puts's Second Oboe

Concerto, subtitled *Moonlight* after the 2016 film that inspired it, was written for soloist Katherine Needleman. Following music by two gifted composers still in their forties, Copland's Third Symphony, composed near the end of the Second World War, seemed to evoke a simpler, bygone America. Alsop led a performance that emphasised Copland's earnest, forthright, plain-spoken optimism, all the more poignant in today's suffocating atmosphere of cynical divisiveness.

Two recitals by women pianists made strong impressions. Whether introducing new music, recent music that deserves to be heard more or neglected older music warranting a good listen, the inimitable Jenny Lin brings her commanding technique, silvery sound and keen intellect to bear. At the Library of Congress, Lin shone the gimlet light of her curiosity on music by Artur Schnabel. Soprano Marlissa Hudson joined her for a stunning set of songs Schnabel composed for his wife, and Cornelius Dufallo collaborated in the Violin Sonata. Most compelling was Lin's performance of movements from Schnabel's Piano Sonata, brought vividly to life with her variety of touch and wealth of colour.

The disarmingly unaffected stage persona of Simone Dinnerstein becomes riveting the moment she is seated at the piano. Her Kennedy Center recital included pieces by Couperin, Philip Glass's *Mad Rush* and the *Arabesque* and *Kreisleriana* of Schumann. Playing without intermission and

virtually without pause, Dinnerstein created an aura of spellbinding concentration, enveloping the audience. *Mad Rush* seemed shot through with ever-changing light, while *Kreisleriana* confided secrets of troubles and joys, obsessions and aspirations, with Schumann's vaunted 'inner voices' blossoming as psychological necessities.

Washington's chamber music is varied and plentiful. Imani Winds (flautist Brandon Patrick George, oboist Toyin Spellman-Diaz, clarinettist Mark Dover, Jeff Scott on horn and Monica Ellis on bassoon) have commissioned new work from composers of colour over the past dozen years. Their Kennedy Center concert in January premiered Henry Threadgill's *2.6 Pentadactyl* on a programme with works by John Harbison, Lalo Schifrin and Valerie Coleman. Jeff Scott's witty riff on ragtime, *Startin' Sumthin'*, and Reena Esmail's sensuous *The Light is the Same*, inspired by the Sufi poet Rumi, leavened an exhilarating two hours of top-flight music-making.

Earlier in January, the justly acclaimed Calidore Quartet (violinists Jeffrey Myers and Ryan Meehan, viola player Jeremy Berry

and cellist Estelle Choi) returned to the Phillips Collection for the local premiere of Caroline Shaw's *Three Essays*, co-commissioned by the Phillips. This three-movement meditation on the variety of human communication held the audience rapt. The *Essays* were framed by a stylish late Haydn quartet and Schumann's Third Quartet in a loving, emotionally cohesive performance.

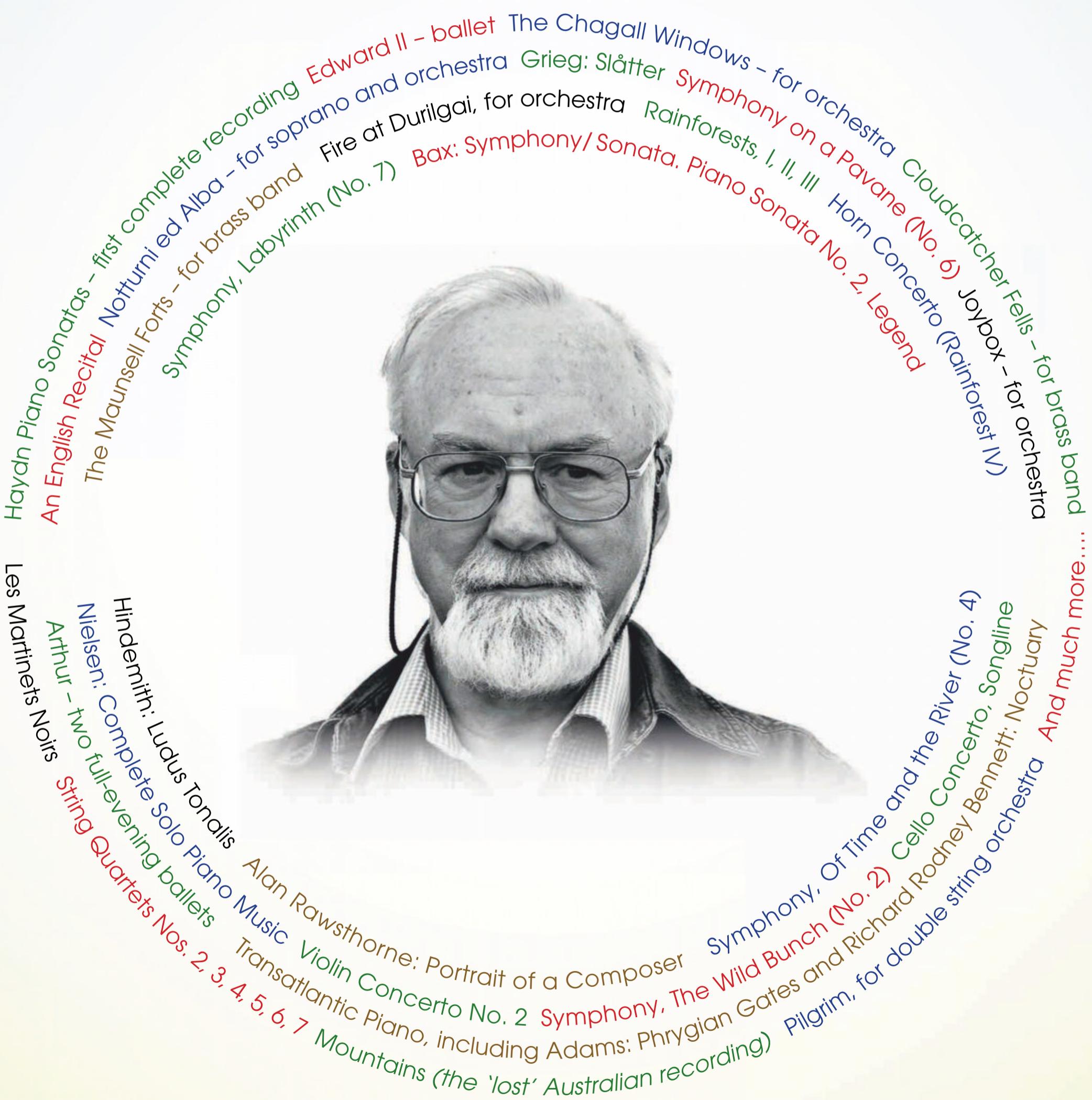
The following week the Phillips hosted the final stop on the eagerly awaited and warmly received US debut tour of the baritone Benjamin Appl, with pianist James Baillieu, in works by Schubert, Nico Muhly, Grieg, and Schumann.

The Library of Congress holds the world's third-largest collections of Liszt materials. Surprisingly, in February, Liszt's *A Faust Symphony* was heard here for the first time since 1946. On a programme that also included Nicholas Angelich playing Schumann's Piano Concerto, Gianandrea Noseda led the National Symphony in a lean, impassioned, richly detailed performance of Liszt's masterpiece. Now in the second season of Noseda's leadership, the NSO seems poised on the brink of realising its full artistic potential.

Concluding on a sad note, early February brought the news from upstate New York of the death of Nancy B Reich, the distinguished biographer of Clara Schumann. Nancy was in the forefront of new musicology investigating the historical contributions of women. She will be missed. **G**

John McCabe

80th Birthday Year



Getting – and earning – audience attention

The exact reason a conductor grabs wide attention varies. Primarily, one hopes, it's due to the music-making. But sometimes context matters too. Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla made headlines when she took over as Music Director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in September 2016 – a young, largely unknown presence on the podium (and, in a world far from full of female conductors, a woman too), she was stepping into a slot filled, with impeccable prescience time after time, by conductors who went on to become the very leading exponents of their craft: Sir Simon Rattle (Berlin Philharmonic, London Symphony), Sakari Oramo (BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra) and Andris Nelsons (Boston Symphony Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra). None of which is, in any way, to lessen the importance and impact of their time at the CBSO – an orchestra able to hold up its head in the company of any of the above-named ensembles – for their incumbencies all proved rich ones: Rattle received *Gramophone* Awards for Szymanowski (twice), Schoenberg and Mahler (that last one Recording of the Year); Oramo conducted our Gold Disc-winning survey of Saint-Saëns's piano concertos played by Stephen Hough, and imaginatively championed the music of John Foulds; Nelsons added well-received Strauss and Tchaikovsky to the catalogue. It's fair to say that, due to inspired conductor choices and musical excellence, the CBSO has become something of a bellwether for where orchestral music-making might be going. Since



joining them, Gražinytė-Tyla has transcended the hype and already gained her own reputation for excellence, and we're about to hear her start her symphonic journey on disc too. Being signed to Deutsche Grammophon, and choosing for her label debut to record Mieczysław Weinberg, a composer she's deeply committed to championing, are both strong statements. As she begins what promises to be a fascinating journey, it seems a perfect time to catch up with her for our cover story.

One of our other features this month pays a birthday tribute to a group who have done more than most to champion choral music: The Sixteen, led by their indefatigable and ever-cheery founder and conductor Harry Christophers. It long impressed me that their annual Choral Pilgrimage tours could fill regional venues with non-specialist audiences to hear obscure Renaissance music. Rather than resting on their laurels, they then proceeded to add some specially commissioned contemporary pieces – not least by Sir James MacMillan – to the mix too, and through Genesis Sixteen offer invaluable experience to the next generation of choral singers. So while we wish them a very happy birthday, they also serve as a reminder that a creative approach to what you do, and who you are, can reach many more people than simply turning up and performing wonderfully ever would alone. Just as with the CBSO's string of imaginative conductors, it's the audiences, the ensemble, and the music itself which are the winners.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'I've always kicked myself for missing Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla's first ever gig with the CBSO in 2015,' says **RICHARD**

BRATBY, 'but I've tried not to miss any of her performances since. You only have to meet her for five minutes to understand why CBSO audiences – and players – are drawing parallels with the Rattle era.'



'Interview time with Harry Christophers is always friendly time,' says **LINDSAY KEMP**, author of our feature on The Sixteen this issue, 'and talking to him about 40 years with his superb choir was a reminder that humility and collaborative spirit don't have to be incompatible with the highest musical standards.'



'It's fascinating to meet an artist in their own home and Kristian Bezuidenhout's was as inspirational as his musicianship,' says **HARRIET SMITH**, who interviews the pianist this issue. 'It was also a luxury to spend time beforehand delving into his recordings of Mozart and Mendelssohn.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Michelle Assay
Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer)
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Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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Volume 96 Number 1174

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New Releases
May 2019



APPLE MUSIC

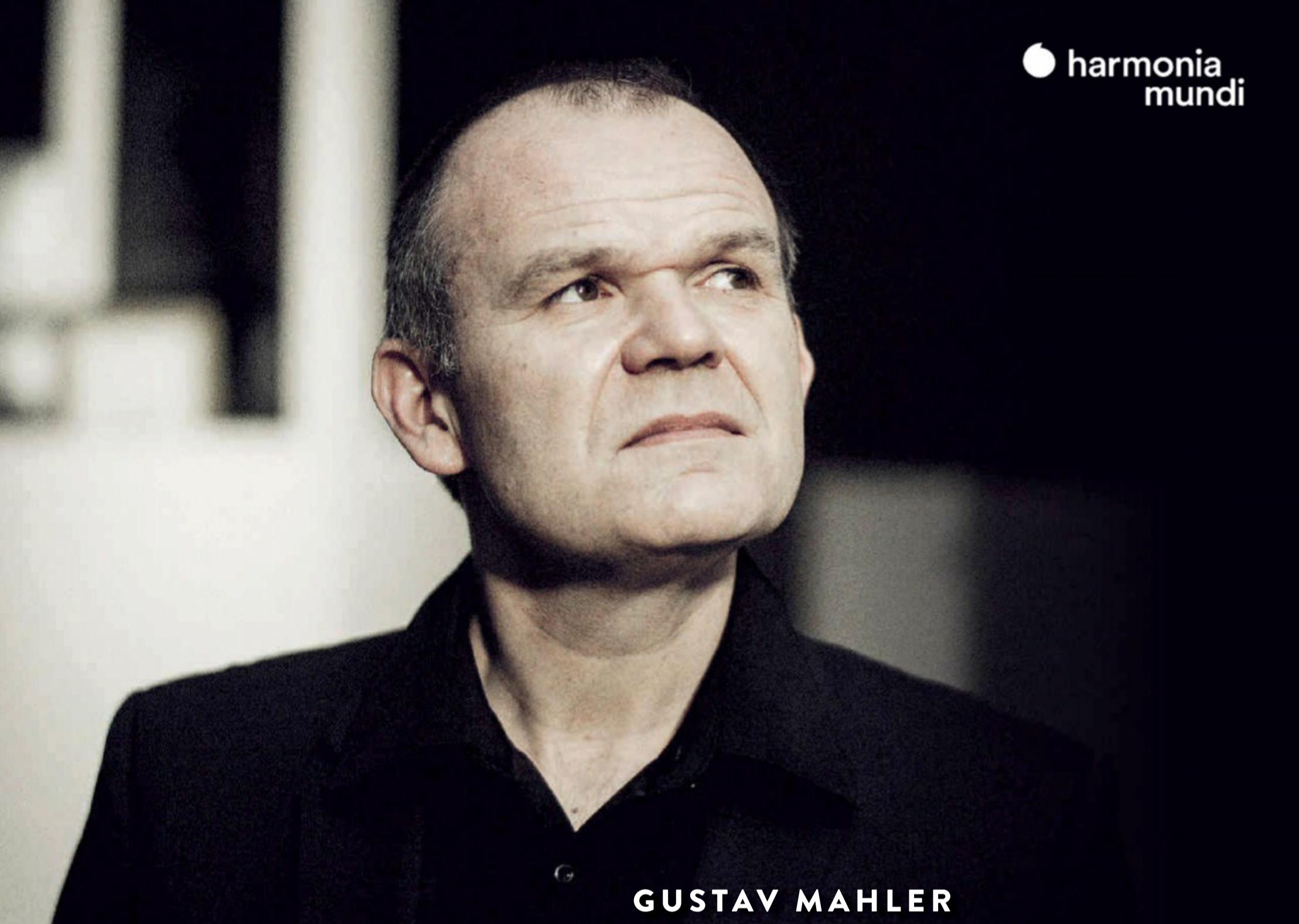
naïve



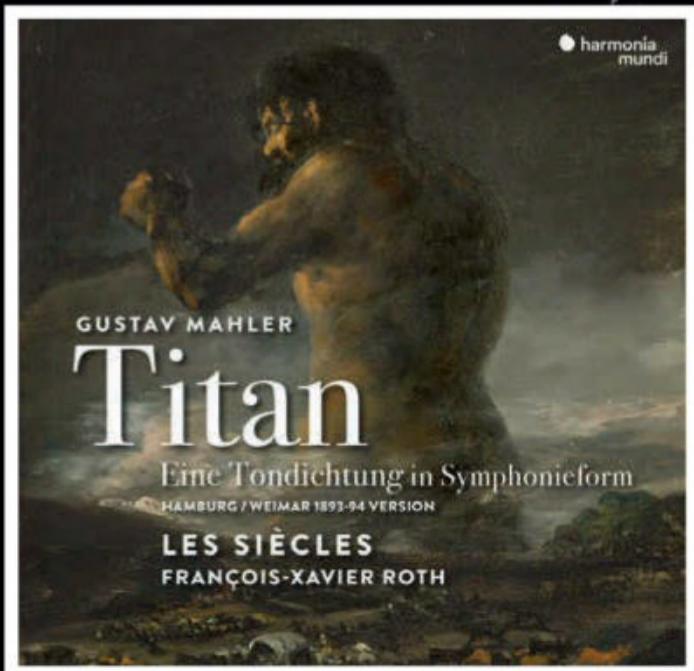
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Les Siècles has worked from the Budapest, Hamburg and Weimar manuscripts, in close collaboration with Universal Edition, the musicologist Anna Stoll Knecht and Benjamin Garzia, to offer us, on the types of instruments on which it was premiered and for the first time on record, the second version (Hamburg/Weimar 1893-94) of Mahler's First Symphony. Initially presented as a symphonic poem in two parts and five movements entitled 'Titan', this version continually faced severe criticism as it developed. The fascinating reconstruction testifies in many respects to the genius of one of the greatest symphonists of the modern era!

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GRAMOPHONE Editor's choice G

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



BEETHOVEN

Piano Sonatas Nos 30-32
Steven Osborne *pf*
 Hyperion
 ► **HARRIET SMITH'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 32**

Outstanding piano-playing from Steven Osborne – from extreme delicacy to energetic drama, everything in these late Beethoven sonatas feels newly thought-through.

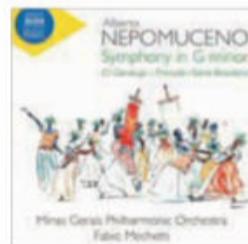


Pablo Heras-Casado

Harmonia Mundi
 Kristian Bezuidenhout is on superb form here, a real period keyboard delight.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 42**

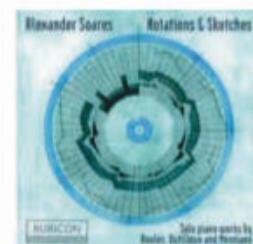
MENDELSSOHN Piano Concerto No 2, Symphony No 1
Kristian Bezuidenhout *fp*
Freiburg Baroque Orchestra /



NEPOMUCENO Orchestral Works
Minas Gerais Philharmonic Orchestra / **Fabio Mechetti**
 Naxos

An auspicious way to start a 30-disc survey of Brazilian music from Naxos – hopefully one full of discoveries just like this.

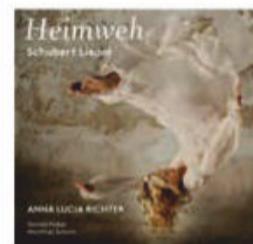
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 45**



BOULEZ, DUTILLEUX, MESSIAEN
 'Notations & Sketches'
Alexander Soares *pf*
 Rubicon
 For his debut

album, British pianist Alexander Soares has chosen a fascinating 20th-century programme, with an instinctive grasp of the composers' sound worlds.

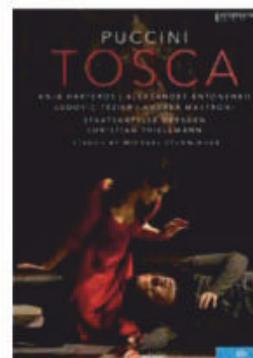
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 67**



SCHUBERT 'Heimweh'
Anna Lucia Richter *sop*
Gerold Huber *pf*
 Pentatone
 There's something movingly

communicative about Anna Lucia Richter's Schubert-singing, all impeccably done, with a strong sense of humanity and engagement.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 83**



DVD/BLU-RAY
PUCCINI *Tosca*
 Soloists; **Staatskapelle Dresden** / **Christian Thielemann**
 C Major Entertainment
 A modern setting adds its own atmosphere to this *Tosca* from Salzburg, led by the superb Anja Harteros in the title role.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 95**



TAVENER 'Angels'
Winchester Cathedral Choir / **Andrew Lumsden**
 Hyperion
 Chosen works from John Tavener, whose music reflected both a sense of heaven and our experience of humanity, given uplifting performances by Winchester Cathedral Choir.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**



► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**

REISSUE/ARCHIVE

MIKHAIL PLETNEV
 Moscow 1979 Recital
Mikhail Pletnev *pf*
 Melodiya

A thrilling recital from just a year after Mikhail Pletnev's Tchaikovsky Competition Gold Medal.

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FOR THE RECORD

The tenor Benjamin Bernheim signs to DG

Deutsche Grammophon has signed another impressive young artist to its roster – the French tenor Benjamin Bernheim. The first fruits of the 33-year-old lyric tenor's deal with the Yellow Label will appear this autumn: joined by the Prague Philharmonia and Emmanuel Vuillaume, he has recorded an album of French, Italian and Russian opera arias (Gounod, Massenet, Donizetti, Puccini, Verdi and Tchaikovsky). 'Opera has the power to touch people's souls and enrich their lives, and I'm happy that I'll be able to reach a broader audience worldwide in partnership with DG,' said Bernheim.

Announcing the signing, DG's President Clemens Trautmann commented that 'Benjamin owns much more than a sublime voice. He is always searching for those vital elements that lie beneath the music's surface, demonstrating a combination of intuition and empathy as well as technical mastery. We're determined to introduce this remarkable young star to a large new audience, and show why



DG-bound: Benjamin Bernheim

he's in such high demand at the world's leading opera companies.'

Bernheim has received fine reviews for two of his key roles: Rodolfo (*La bohème*) at Covent Garden, the Paris Opera and at the Vienna State Opera, and Alfredo (*La traviata*) at La Scala, in Berlin and Zurich.

Roles in opera DVDs have already earned positive note in these pages – he was described as 'an excellent Cassio' in a DVD of *Otello* conducted by Christian Thielemann in 2017, while in 2016 he was also praised for his performance of Tebaldo in Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*. He also in fact made an earlier DG appearance, in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, on a recording from the Salzburg Festival starring Anna Netrebko.

Bernheim made his role debut as Des Grieux in *Manon* at the Opéra national de Bordeaux in April, and debuts the role of Ismaele in *Nabucco* in Zurich in June. Later this year he will also make his role and house debut as the Duke in *Rigoletto* at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich.

Carl Nielsen competition chooses its 2019 winners

This year's Carl Nielsen International Competition took place last month – the first time all three categories of violin, flute and clarinet (the instruments for which Nielsen wrote a concerto) had been held in the same year.

The winning musicians were violinist Johan Dalene (18, from Sweden – pictured), clarinettist Blaz Sparovec (24, from Slovenia) and flautist Joséphine Olech (24, from France). Each winner receives €12,000, a recording with the Odense Symphony Orchestra on the Orchid Classics label, and performance opportunities with up to 10 orchestras.

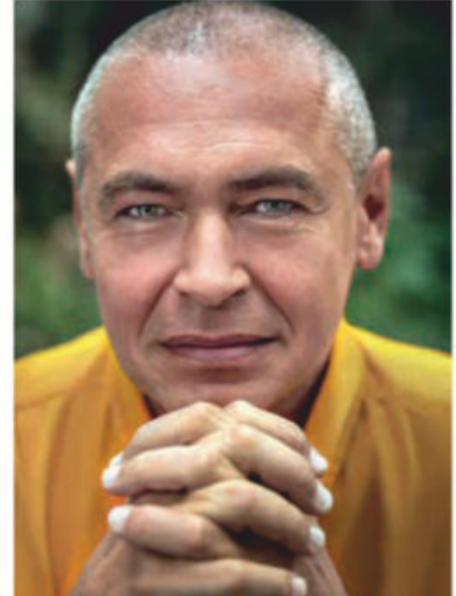
Last time the violin category was held, in 2016, the two joint winners were Jiyoong Lee and Liya Petrova: both went on to be included in *Gramophone*'s monthly 'One to Watch' feature, while Lee's recording of the Nielsen and Korngold violin concertos, on Orchid Classics, was named an Editor's Choice in our Awards 2018 issue, and Petrova's (in her case the Nielsen paired with the Prokofiev First) was highly praised in November.

The competition is open to musicians under the age of 30; its President the violinist Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider is himself a former winner, while artistic advisers included clarinettist Martin Fröst and flautist Emmanuel Pahud.



Ivo Pogorelich joins the Sony Classical roster

The pianist Ivo Pogorelich has signed a contract with Sony Classical. After a gap of some 24 years since his last commercial release (he recorded 14 albums for DG between 1981 and 1995), the 60-year-old pianist has returned to the studio. The first recording for his new label, due out this autumn, will be of Rachmaninov's Second Piano Sonata coupled with two by Beethoven, No 22 in F, Op 54 and No 24 in F sharp, Op 78.

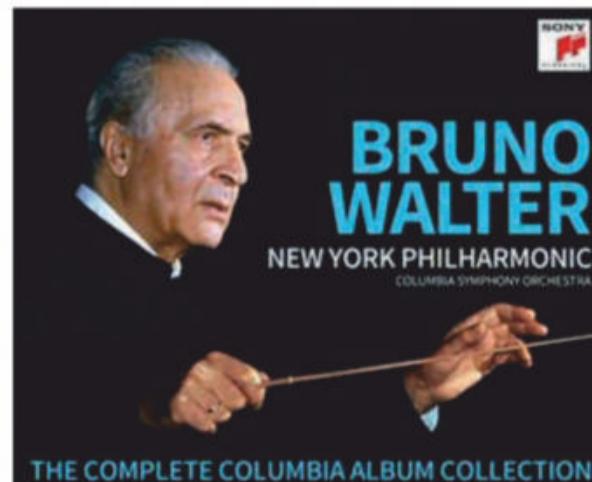


Announcing the signing, Sony Classical's President, Bogdan Rošić, said that 'Ivo Pogorelich's discography is one of the seven wonders of recorded music, and I have been trying to add to it for a long time now. We couldn't be happier that he has decided to go back to the studio and Sony Classical will be releasing his new work starting later this year.' The pianist himself added that 'I am very glad that Sony expressed interest in my current work. Many years ago the founder of the company, Mr Akio Morita, presented me with a gift – a remastered set of the original recordings of Sergei Rachmaninov – the result of an application of the then available technology used by Sony engineers. On my first Sony recording ... I play a work by Sergei Rachmaninov ... and I am very pleased by this association!'

Bruno Walter's US legacy from Sony

One of the great conductors of the 20th century, Bruno Walter, is the subject of a forthcoming 77-CD box-set from Sony Classical, celebrating his legacy on CBS. Walter, born Bruno Schlesinger in 1876, was a friend and disciple of Gustav Mahler, the premieres of whose *Das Lied von der Erde* and Ninth Symphony he conducted in 1911 and 1912 respectively. Famously he gave Mahler's Ninth Symphony with the Vienna Philharmonic in January 1938 shortly before the Anschluss (the performance was recorded live by HMV, and is one of the classics of the gramophone catalogue). When Austria was annexed by the Nazis, Walter was in Amsterdam and managed to escape to the USA, where he settled.

It was in the US that Walter, already in his sixties, enjoyed an Indian Summer. Columbia Records (CBS) formed an orchestra in Los Angeles (comprising players from the LAPO and movie studio musicians) with whom Walter would record. Sony Classical's set includes all the



Bruno Walter gets the complete-album treatment

recordings made with the Columbia SO and the New York Philharmonic between 1941 and 1961. The repertoire features the great works of the Austro-German literature with multiple versions of key works including Brahms and Beethoven symphonies. The set includes eight CDs of interviews and rehearsal tapes, facsimiles from the New York Philharmonic archives, full discographical notes and work index. The set will be released on June 28.

ONE TO WATCH

Andrei Ioniță cellist

The BBC New Generation Artist scheme has long been an accurate guide to the finest young artists, its opportunities for creative collaboration and recording experience helping shape its alumni. For the past two years, one such scheme member was the cellist Andrei Ioniță, who has just released a solo album on the Orchid Classics label.

Born in 1994 in Bucharest, Ioniță began playing the cello at the age of eight, his studies ultimately taking him to Berlin, where he now lives and plays a 1671 Giovanni Battista Rogeri cello on loan from the Deutsche Stiftung Musikleben. He first gained prominence in 2015, winning the cello category of the International Tchaikovsky Competition, while performances have ranged from the Munich to the Czech Philharmonics, and from the Hallé to the Mariinsky Orchestra. As for forthcoming events, alongside concerto performances he'll join Steven Kovacevich, Martha Argerich and Stephen Hough for chamber projects later this year.

But while it's already an impressive CV by any standards, perhaps the most interesting insight into his creative mind is the repertoire for that forthcoming album. Opening with Bach's Cello Suite No 1, it then moves on to the

world premiere recording of *Eleven Oblique Strategies*, a solo suite by Australian composer Brett Dean written in 2014. Based on cards from a set designed by musician Brian

Eno and artist Peter Schmidt in the 1970s, the result is a series of short pieces of sometimes highly exposed intense physicality and virtuoso challenge; it's a fascinating demonstration of the cello's sound world, but equally a vivid portrait of Ioniță's virtuosity and imaginative command of colour. This is followed by Kodály's Sonata for solo cello, while the concluding work is another highly virtuoso contemporary one, a delightfully engaging blue-grass-inspired piece by Svante Henryson called *Black Run*. It should all leave listeners in little doubt that here is a cellist of superb skill, musical imagination and a commitment to music of our time.

Andrei Ioniță's 'Oblique Strategies' will be reviewed next issue



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Podcasts

This month's podcast episodes include Editor-in-Chief James Jolly in conversation with violinist Augustin Hadelich about his new recording of Brahms and Ligeti violin concertos, released on Warner Classics. He also talks to percussionist Colin Currie about recording the music of Steve Reich - including *Clapping Music*, performed with the composer himself - on his own label. Plus, there's a special podcast in which the Director of the BBC Proms David Pickard tells Editor Martin Cullingford about this year's season. Find our weekly podcasts by searching for 'Gramophone Magazine' in your podcast application of choice!



Our special Proms podcast explores the 2019 season

The Gramophone Listening Room

Each week James Jolly prepares, and introduces, a playlist comprising some of the most exciting new releases and archive classics. Log on to listen!

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Our regular blogs, written both by members of the *Gramophone* team and special guests from across the musical world, touch on key issues including the importance of reviving lost works, commissioning contemporary music and inspiring new audiences.

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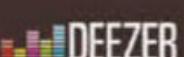
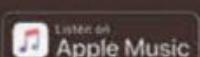
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Since his 2014 victory in BBC Young Musician of the Year competition, Martin James Bartlett has built a considerable international reputation. *Love and Death*, with its imaginatively conceived programme, gives proof of his artistic range.

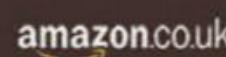
Includes Liszt's transcription of Schumann's *Widmung* and Wagner's *Isoldes Liebestod*, alongside Liszt's *Liebestraum* No.3, *Petrarch Sonnets* and Prokofiev's thrilling Sonata No.7.

"Bartlett's career has begun to take off... He's clearly destined for great things"

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ARTISTS & their INSTRUMENTS

Jess Gillam on her hand-engraved alto saxophone by Yanagisawa

“I got my first Yanagisawa saxophone at the age of 12 when I was at secondary school. The sound immediately appealed to me, and I liked how responsive it was. With any wind instrument, you’re producing such a personal sound – it comes from inside your own body – so it’s important to have an instrument that reacts quickly and aids you in making the voice you want to create.

Yanagisawa are based in Tokyo (their factory is made up of several houses all knocked together) and they treat every saxophone with such care; I really like the fact that they do so much of their work by hand. As an endorsee of their instruments, I got to try out the new ‘WO series’ alto back in 2014; I tried quite a lot of saxophones over a short period of time, in different situations – in concerts, during practice sessions – and I was really taken with the ‘AWO20U’.

Saxophones are generally made of brass, or silver-plated brass, but this one is bronze and I find this metal a lot more resonant. Also, most saxes look shiny and polished because of the lacquer that’s used, but mine is unlacquered; this allows the metal to react with the air, and also with the acid from your hands, to create a sound that’s warm and mellow.

I find the key positioning really comfortable, which is important if you’re playing any music



that requires fast fingerwork (which is most music!). Another thing about my sax is that the keypads are waterproof and therefore very durable. This is essential when you’re travelling a lot; my current pads have lasted about a year so far, which is brilliant when you consider how much use they’ve had. Any performer needs an



instrument that’s utterly reliable; for me, it’s essential that I feel confident in being able to produce the sound I want, and the fact that my instrument can take a lot of wear really helps with that feeling.

When I was speaking to Yanagisawa and ordering my alto, they said to me, ‘Since we hand-engrave our instruments, is there any specific engraving you’d like?’ My mum loves art, and I knew she was great at it, so I asked her to do a drawing for me. She did it freehand, nailed it at probably the second attempt, and then we took a picture of it, scanned it and sent it to Japan. They replicated it by hand, using just one tool; they sent me pictures when the bell was being engraved, and then when it was being shipped over. My mum is a lady of few words but I think she was impressed!

My sax has definitely lived up to all my expectations. In fact, now that I’ve had it for a while, I’ve adjusted even more to its nuances – to how it reacts and responds. I have a soprano sax too (again by Yanagisawa, and again unlacquered) and I play both of them on my new album ‘Rise’. I love them so much – to the point that I don’t have any real plans to replace them. ”

‘Rise’ is released on Decca on April 26

Gramophone’s Medici monthly



Each month we draw together a number of videos on Medici.tv for you. In May, watch Yanick Nézet-Séguin (left) return to the Rotterdam Philharmonic for Mahler’s *Totentfeier* and Shostakovich’s Symphony No 13, *Babi Yar*. Gianandrea Noseda continues his admired Shostakovich symphony series with the LSO with the First Symphony (set into an all-Russian concert that also features Rachmaninov’s Second Piano Concerto with Seong-Jin Cho). And, dipping into the archive, catch Mstislav Rostropovich and the Berlin Philharmonic in the four interludes from the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. Our Young Artist is DG’s new tenor Benjamin Bernheim (see page 8) – catch him in Puccini’s *Messa di Gloria*. For our Masterclass, Quatuor Ebène put a couple of trios through their paces in Ravel’s Piano Trio, live from Verbier 2018. We’ve also a 1960s piano recital by Alexis Weissenberg, and for our back-to-back performance, two interpretations of Schumann’s Piano Concerto, from Mikhail Pletnev (2017) and Martha Argerich (2006). Our opera is Verdi’s *Il trovatore*, conducted by Riccardo Muti (La Scala, 2001). Just visit medici.tv and search for ‘Gramophone selects’.

PHOTOGRAPH: RICHARD BOLL, HANS VAN DER WOERD

Naxos celebrates Brazil’s music

Naxos has embarked on a 30-album series of recordings devoted to the classical music of Brazil of the 19th and 20th centuries. Among the releases will be a number of world-premiere recordings.

‘The Music of Brazil’, as the series will be called, is part of Brasil em Concerto, a project developed by the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote music by the country’s composers. The first release features the music of Alberto Nepomuceno, performed by the Minas Gerais Philharmonic Orchestra and conducted by Fabio Mechetti, and is reviewed this month (see page 45) – plus we’ve named it an Editor’s Choice. Other ensembles involved include the Goiás Philharmonic Orchestra and the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra. As part of the project, new – or even in some cases first – editions of many works will be prepared.

Klaus Heymann, President and Founder of Naxos, said he had ‘a longstanding interest in the classical music of Brazil’ – indeed more than 100 of the labels’ albums feature Brazilian music. Brazilian pianist Nelson Friere, meanwhile, commented: ‘It is a ground-breaking project, which will contribute to making Brazilian classical music more widely known and appreciated in the world.’



MAY RELEASES

HYBRID SUPER AUDIO CD IN SURROUND SOUND



RECORDING OF THE MONTH

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Audun Iversen | Edvard Grieg Kor | Paul Robinson
Håkon Matti Skrede

This outstanding Debut Recording intersperses music by Ole Bull, Agathe Backer Grøndahl and David Lang with Grieg's Fire Salmer and Ave Maris Stella.

CHSA 5232



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Michael Collins
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CHANDOS CHACONNE



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Sophie Yates

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EDWARD ELGAR
STRING QUARTET
PIANO QUINTET
Martin Roscoe | Brodsky Quartet
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In Case You Missed It!



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STRING QUARTETS 1-3
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PURCELL
FANTASIAS
Doric String Quartet
Recorded in the Concert Hall at Snape Maltings and featuring Britten's own viola

GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ... *Madrigal*

Lindsay Kemp explores the development of this secular, multi-part vocal composition

We all know what a madrigal is, don't we? Creatures somehow being 'merry-minded', fa-la-la, Merrie England and all that. A jolly part-song suitable for singing at home by competent amateurs. And for readers of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, the catalyst for an excruciating moment of barely averted social crash-and-burn for its main character. To anyone who remembers that episode, the very word 'madrigal' may be enough to induce a wince. But there's more to the madrigal than all that. Its history may be essentially restricted to little more than a hundred years, primarily in Italy – but it occupied the talents of some of the finest composers of the age.

The derivation of the word is a mystery, and although there were pieces called madrigals in the 14th century, the form as we understand it today – a secular vocal composition in several parts, mixing counterpoint with melody and perhaps a touch of enlivening rhythm to distinguish it from more sober sacred music, all combining to communicate a secular poetic text – first appeared in Italy around 1530. Its earliest masters, however, were composers from northern Europe – Verdelot, Arcadelt and Willaert who worked in Venice and Rome. In their hands the madrigal became, by mid-century, a dominant form in Italy.

Success led to experiments in chromaticism, which brought a more intensely emotional mode of expression, as demonstrated by Cipriano de Rore, who used jarring dissonances and jagged themes as well as more symbolic tone-painting devices such as ascending or descending scales, higher or lower registers, to illuminate the text. At the same time there were lighter, often pastoral-flavoured



'A Madrigal' by John Callcott Horsley (1817-1903): 'a jolly part-song to sing at home'

madrigals by, say, Andrea Gabrieli and (at first) Marenzio; it was this type that captured the imaginations of imitating English madrigalists such as Weelkes, Morley and Wilbye.

But in general the direction was towards greater emotion and an ever-increasing insistence on the primacy of the words, an attitude that yielded dramatic results in the 'mannerist' works of Luzzaschi, Marenzio and Gesualdo. The emotional apogee was reached with Monteverdi, initially following in the footsteps of De Wert, then striking out on his own; his madrigal books of the early 1600s caused controversy, breaking compositional rules for expressive ends. The madrigal style was to find its way into Monteverdi's 1607 opera *Orfeo*, but it shared the stage with the new monodic manner (single voice, continuo accompaniment) that would supplant it altogether. Monteverdi's later books of so-called madrigals (the last in 1638) leaned increasingly towards this monodic style, and by the mid-17th century the old-style madrigal was effectively dead.

Where the word madrigal crops up in later music, it's usually to honour it more in spirit than in imitation, suggesting a non-specific 'old' style of writing, such as in the instrumental 'madrigals' of Martinů. Perhaps most convincing are the 19th-century madrigals of Robert Pearsall, of which *Lay A Garland* is the best known. G

► Listen to our Madrigal playlist on Qobuz

IN THE STUDIO

● In May, the pianist **Boris Giltburg** is heading to The Friary in Liverpool to record Beethoven's Piano Concertos Nos 1-3 along with the Rondo in B flat (originally belonging to the Second Piano Concerto); Giltburg will be joined by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, under Vasily Petrenko. Piano Concertos Nos 1 and 2, plus the Rondo, will be released on Naxos as 'Volume 1' in October; No 3 will form part of 'Volume 2', also on Naxos, the release date of which is still to be confirmed.

● **Simon Wallfisch** has just completed a Schumann Lieder recording for Resonus Classics. At the end of March, the baritone was with pianist Edward Rushton at SJE Arts in Oxford to record *Dichterliebe* Op 48, *Kerner-Lieder* Op 35 and *Fünf Lieder* Op 40. Adam Binks was producing, and the results will be released in September.

● **Phantasm** were in Berlin recently recording a programme of JS Bach at a venue previously favoured by Karajan – the Jesus-Christus-Kirche in Berlin-Dahlem. The programme, conceived by director Laurence Dreyfus, included music from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* arranged for viol consort. The recording on Linn will be released sometime next year.

● Former BBC New Generation Artists the **Escher Quartet** left New York for Suffolk in February to record an all-American programme for BIS. With works by Barber and Ives, the disc is out later in 2019.

● Earlier this month, the **English Chamber Orchestra** and pianist-conductor **Benjamin Hochman** were at St John's Smith Square to record Mozart's Piano Concertos Nos 17 and 24 for Avie, out in October.

● **Mark Fitz-Gerald** has recorded an album in Germany of Shostakovich's film music, including *The Bedbug* and the English conductor's own reconstruction of *Love and Hate*. Back in February, he was joined by the Rheinland-Pfälz State Philharmonic and the Opernchor des Nationaltheaters Mannheim to record the music for Naxos, to be released by the label this November.

● **Ivan Ilić** was at Potton Hall last month to make the world premiere recordings of Haydn's Symphonies Nos 44, 75 and 92 transcribed for solo piano by Carl David Stegmann, using manuscripts Ilić himself had discovered. The disc, for Chandos, is due for release in August.

ORCHESTRA *Insight...*

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

Founded 1918

Home Victoria Hall, Geneva

Music Director Jonathan Nott (since 2017)

Founding Music Director Ernest Ansermet

In the year he stood down as music director of the ensemble he founded almost half a century earlier, Ernest Ansermet penned an opinion piece for *Gramophone*. 'I had given my orchestra a certain style, and for me a style is the only thing which grades an orchestra,' wrote Ansermet in 1967 of the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. Even today, the OSR is discussed through the prism of that style and the repertoire on which it was honed.

Ansermet was born the other side of Switzerland's biggest lake from Geneva. After working his way around the shoreline, he oversaw his orchestra's formation and rise with the strategy of an entrepreneur, gobbling up the competition (the Lausanne Radio Orchestra, whose amalgamation with the OSR in 1938 took the latter ensemble to full strength and made it a broadcasting ensemble by default) and transferring his relationship with Decca from London to Geneva, bringing us over 300 recordings as a result.

Ansermet's connection to Diaghilev and Franco-Russian ballet music would come to define his ensemble. He admired the clarity of texture and rhythm in Stravinsky's works in particular, and bred the same qualities in his band. While he worked to make the ensemble predominantly Swiss, the influence of the smooth Austro-German brass, tangy French winds and supple Italian strings who made up its first cohort never quite went away. Nor did the presence of Ansermet. He insisted an orchestra be shaped by a single galvanizing figure, only inviting guests 'from time to time'. When the ensemble visited the Proms under its British Music Director Jonathan Nott last summer, the 'A' word was mentioned plenteously in reviews.



Perhaps the repertoire prompted it: Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and Debussy's *Jeux*.

Like successors to Alex Ferguson, Music Directors after Ansermet tended not to hang around. Armin Jordan, one exception, was credited with rediscovering the orchestra's sense of adventure during his 12-year tenure ending in 1997. Marek Janowski returned the OSR to touring and recording, bringing Pentatone on board and delivering an unlikely but sleek Bruckner cycle (it was the brass that persuaded Janowski it would work).

Neeme Järvi and Kazuki Yamada (its first Principal Guest Conductor) ploughed the central furrow of Francophile and Russophile dance music, Mark Pullinger noting the 'weightier sound' in Yamada's Tchaikovsky and Glazunov (4/16). On the right side of Ansermet's disdain for heft? Probably. While colours may darken, and those winds have been tamed, it's a dancer's flexibility and rhythmic exactitude that Ansermet would have wanted preserving, and which we're still hearing clearly

under Nott. **Andrew Mellor**

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New conducting comp

The Hallé has announced plans to choose its Assistant Conductor via a new three-day competition, starting in 2020. Named after the sponsor, Siemens AG, the prize will include a two-year post as Assistant Conductor with the Manchester-based ensemble, where the winner will work under Hallé Music Director Sir Mark Elder. Previous incumbents of the post have included Edward Gardner, Andrew Gourlay and Ewa Strusińska. They will also lead the Hallé Youth Orchestra and receive a prize of £15,000.



RBC Principal Julian Lloyd Webber and his students

Label launch at RBC

The Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (RBC) and Naxos have joined forces to launch a

series of debut discs for students at the conservatoire. When the RBC recently unveiled its £57m new building, recording facilities (including no fewer than seven recording studios) and technology were an integral part. The students chosen to launch the partnership are pianists Daniel Lebhardt, Roman Kosyakov, Pascal Pascaleff, Andrey Ivanov and Domonkos Czaby, and viola player Yue Yu.

Early focus at Resonus

Resonus Classics has announced the launch of a sub-label - Inventa Records - which will focus on early music. This will become the home of choral group Alamire, directed by David Skinner, whose release of choral works by Hieronymus Praetorius will be the first on the label. Future releases will include an album of music by Ferrabosco - both father and son - and cantatas by Handel with the American countertenor Lawrence Zazzo.

Early music has been a key focus of Resonus Classics since it was founded in 2011. 'By launching Inventa Records,' said Adam Binks, Managing Director of Resonus Classics, 'Resonus continues to cement its dedication to the genre and develop its exploration into the rich and rewarding field of period performance.'

FROM WHERE I SIT

Great artists continue to be inspired by Tchaikovsky's ballet scores, says Edward Seckerson



I was a little late to the party in respect of Vladimir Jurowski's scintillating new recording of the original 1877 version of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* with the State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia (Yevgeny Svetlanov's orchestra) but I've been much absorbed by it, thrilled by it, and fascinated as ever by the conductor's comments (in the October 2018 issue) regarding the age old issues of structure and tempi in the court of classical ballet – and in particular the relationship (indeed the tension) between what the music and the first choreographers decreed.

It took me a while to understand the dynamics of classical ballet, the seeming contradiction between effulgent, impassioned music and cool, clear, poised movement. The novelty set pieces – nationalistic dances and the like – were one thing but the naked emotionalism of the great *pas de deux* was quite another. Here was this almost pornographically impassioned music – I am thinking especially of the Rose Adagio from *Sleeping Beauty* – set against the stillest and most finely nuanced movement: a series of almost static poses born of purity and balance. The revelation of discovering how the tension between the two states gave rise to something uniquely expressive was something that I have never quite got over.

Then again the apparent tyranny of classic choreography in classic ballets, revered choreography which the music has traditionally served – not the other way around – is something which doesn't arise when new choreography is created or indeed when the entire ballet and its scenario is re-evaluated and reinvented, as in the case of Matthew Bourne's astonishing *Swan Lake* recently returning for its umpteenth revival. In my fantasies I imagine Tchaikovsky watching it in another life, stunned and overcome by its rightness.

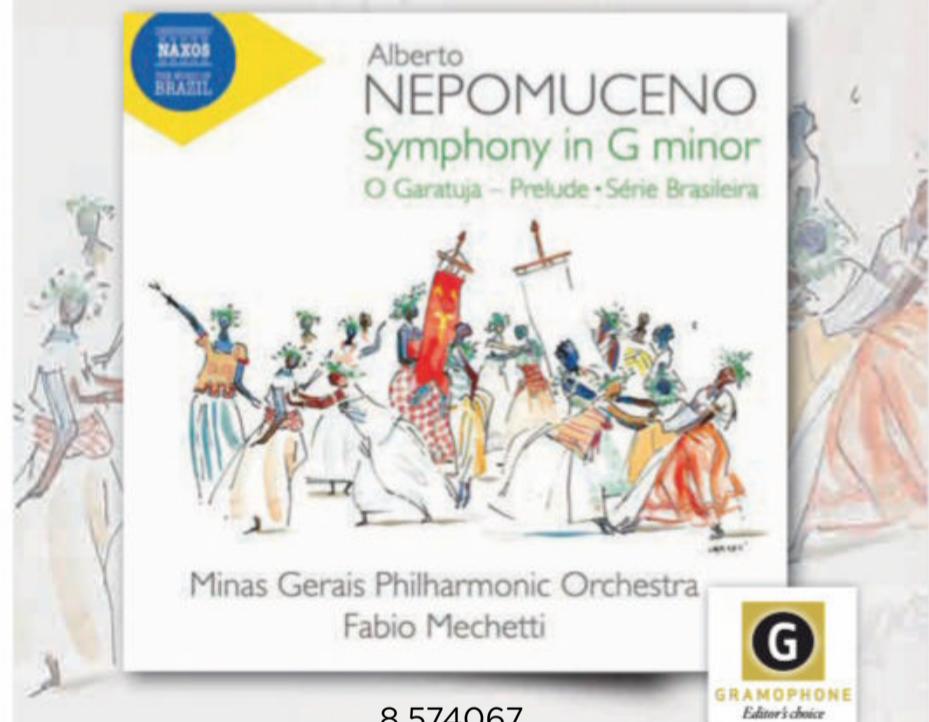
I doubt Bourne will ever do anything better than this. But it is actually more than just a brilliantly imagined take on a great classic but rather a reading of the ballet which movingly subsumes the whole ethos of Tchaikovsky's homosexuality and the theme of forbidden love into the ballet's scenario without betraying what it expresses. The misery of the young prince born to a life of public scrutiny and 'arranged' marriage; the male swans at once so graceful and yet so comfortable in their masculinity; the beguiling arrogance of the leather-trousered black swan and the sexual excitement that his threat engenders.

It is both a tribute to Bourne's artistic sensibilities and his physical response to Tchaikovsky's score that the emotional climacterics of the final scene are almost unbearable to watch. And yet he can be playfully humorous, too. As the young prince's hopeless infatuation grows we notice that the sign on the fence surrounding the lake reads 'Do Not Feed The Swans'. Whereupon a little old lady hobbles by throwing bread on to the lake – and the young prince flings his arms around her and lifts her off the ground. As simple and affecting as the music which underscores it – great music which finds so many ways into our hearts. 



NAXOS LAUNCHES NEW SERIES

THE MUSIC OF BRAZIL



'Not much of South America's 19th music is known around the world. Among the unjustifiably neglected composers of that period and region is Brazilian Alberto Nepomuceno.'

– Fabio Mechetti

'This new 30 album project, Music of Brazil, introduces the general public to a wide range of often unknown composers and orchestral works... It is with great pleasure that we announce this new Naxos project that continues our exploration of Brazil's great musical heritage.'

– Klaus Heymann



MIRGA'S *momentum*

The CBSO's conductor plans to share her discovery of lesser-known composers through some major recordings for DG – and when Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla puts her mind to something there's no stopping her, writes Richard Bratby



The nice thing about being at CBSO Centre is that the people there can't help being friendly. The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra's office and rehearsal building is just five minutes' walk from Symphony Hall, and it packs a lot into a small space. Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla

is sitting in the cafe area that doubles as the musicians' tea room, and as members of the orchestra and staff walk through, she greets each one with a smile and a wave. Music directors of major orchestras

tend to be busy. She's just come out of a planning meeting, and the next thing on her agenda (involving an even stricter deadline) is an appointment with her baby son. But for now, we're talking about the morning in July 2015 when she met the CBSO for the very first time.

'I will be blunt,' she says. 'We started with excerpts from Tchaikovsky's *The Sleeping Beauty*. It was the very last concert of the season, and I think the musicians were tired. I expected

more in the first rehearsal. But there was something else, and it was very strong: they were making music as if they were a youth orchestra. There was this communication – a sense of "Ah! Let's do this together!" And on the second day I thought, "Wow, this is where we start." It was impressive how much they'd changed, the speed with which everybody worked.

And in the concert, they gave more. They'd given a lot in rehearsal, but they gave more.'

The tale has already entered Birmingham orchestral folklore. The CBSO isn't a player-run orchestra, but

for four decades now it's chosen its chief conductors by seeking a consensus between orchestra, audience and management, with the musicians having the decisive vote. An ensemble which in 1979 took a gamble on the 24-year-old Simon Rattle (and which still contains a few of the so-called 'pre-Rattle-ites' who made that far-reaching decision) has few preconceptions about the right sort of maestro: just a remarkably shrewd collective instinct. In 1997, they chose Sakari Oramo after he'd conducted



Then and now: Gražinytė-Tyla during her music directorship at the Salzburg Landestheater (2015-17), and a portrait taken earlier this year to coincide with her signing to DG

just two concerts with the orchestra. In 2007, they plumped for the then-unknown Andris Nelsons after barely three rehearsals.

Gražinytė-Tyla's first concert with the CBSO came just one week after the orchestra's final concert with Nelsons – an emotional Beethoven Ninth at the BBC Proms. Six months later she was offered the job. But throughout that autumn, the buzz in the foyer at Symphony Hall and CBSO Centre left little doubt that the decision was as good as made. 'By the time I got home after that first concert, I was already getting emails from members of the orchestra,' recalls the CBSO's chief executive Stephen Maddock. "Sorry to bother you now, but we had the most amazing concert with Mirga"; "Everybody's talking about it in the pub."

For all her outward enthusiasm, Gražinytė-Tyla is an artist who does nothing without careful thought. She was rehearsing a production of *Carmen* in her capacity as music director of the Landestheater in Salzburg when the call finally came through. 'I had a touch of flu, I was in bed, and when I saw the phone ringing I thought, "I can't take that message now,"' she says. 'It was the next morning that we talked. I felt joy, of course, but also responsibility: taking on those incredible musicians and then thinking about the direction of the orchestra, its role in the city and everything. I thought, "Wow! This is a really huge thing to manage."

Three years on, the relationship – and the philosophy that underlies it – is in full flower, with a new recording deal between Gražinytė-Tyla and Deutsche Grammophon. Unlike many UK orchestras, the CBSO has taken a conscious decision

not to launch its own label, preferring instead to strike commercial deals that have allowed successive music directors to follow their instincts. Oramo recorded Sibelius and Foulds for Erato and Warner; Nelsons laid down Strauss tone poems on Orfeo. But even in 2019, a DG signing still carries a certain cachet. Gražinytė-Tyla doesn't seem remotely daunted by the prospect of joining Karajan and Abbado on the yellow label, though; in fact, she's excited by the artistic freedom that DG is prepared to offer. Her first release is a pairing of symphonies by Weinberg.

'Repertoire-wise, at least, my hope is that we will be able to record some very special – maybe unknown – things. When I think about recording, I feel a sense of responsibility about the fact that what we do stays there forever. Maybe one day I can dream about recording Mahler, but right now I have a feeling that we already have so much of that sort of thing. There's much less ... let's call it "need" for another Beethoven cycle, than there is for the discovery of Weinberg's music.'

This won't be her first major-label disc – that was the Decca recording (made in 2017; released 2018) of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto which went global after its soloist Sheku Kanneh-Mason performed at the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, ending up, to general astonishment, at the top of US pop charts. But when Gražinytė-Tyla talks about Weinberg she leans forward and lights up. Weinberg is a passion inspired in part by her friendship with Gidon Kremer. It's already borne fruit in a Weinberg Weekend in Birmingham in November 2018, during which Gražinytė-Tyla conducted

the combined forces of the CBSO and Kremerata Baltica in the UK premiere of Weinberg's colossal 21st Symphony (*Kaddish*; 1991). Kremer perched among the CBSO's second violins to play the symphony's numerous solos, and that searing performance is captured on the new disc.

'It started through Gidon,' she agrees. 'His passion for Weinberg came very late, even though he met Weinberg in Moscow and was present when the composer played one of his violin sonatas with Oistrakh on the violin. But Gidon says that at that time he was more passionate about Schnittke, Arvo Pärt and Sofia Gubaidulina, and underestimated Weinberg. He invited me to work with Kremerata Baltica, and in 2014 we did Weinberg's First, Third and Fourth Chamber Symphonies. I was fascinated from the very beginning, but it's only now, after having worked quite a bit on several pieces, that I'm beginning to appreciate the full quality of the whole of his huge output.'

Weinberg's work is incredibly diverse. There are examples of the happiest music ever, and the most serious music conceivable. His skills as a composer are incredible: all the pieces I have studied and worked on so far have been incredibly challenging both for the players and for the conductor. Analysing a Weinberg score is a fantastic occupation because he uses every possible technique to connect and develop his themes. These techniques are never just used for the sake of it, but are always very much connected to a certain message he wants to convey.'

'There is this big, big darkness in Weinberg's music. You feel a helplessness in front of it, which you must confront'

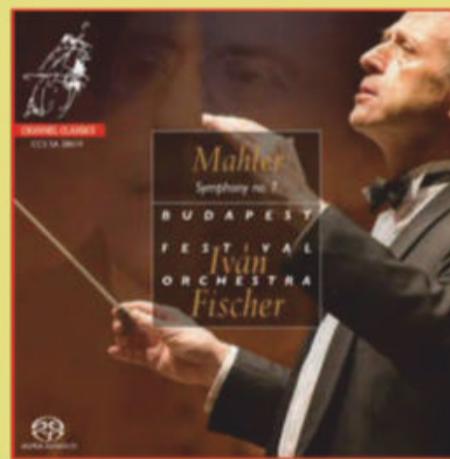
There's certainly no doubting the emotional impact of the 21st Symphony. 'The symphony is a sonic monument for the tragedy of the 20th century. On the one hand, it's an epic: his whole aim was to commemorate everyone who was lost. On the other hand, it is extremely personal, because in dedicating the symphony to the victims of the Warsaw ghetto, Weinberg was also dedicating it to his parents and sister, who were in the ghetto and died in the Holocaust. This is the other point that makes the piece so strong. It has a lot of very slow tempos: very quiet music, very intimate moments with a lot of solos and little chamber ensembles. And yet, with all of that, it still doesn't leave you feeling depressed. It is a very inward reflection – on memories, on war, on many things. It leaves me feeling enriched.'

The 21st Symphony is coupled on the disc with the strikingly different Second Symphony of 1946: scored for string orchestra, it's a showcase for Gražinytė-Tyla's special relationship with Kremerata Baltica. 'It is in G major,' she explains, 'and for me, the first movement is nothing other than spring. It's connected to Weinberg's passion for impressionism while he was studying in Minsk, before his music really started to show the influence of Shostakovich. The second movement is maybe one of the most beautiful *adagios* I know. I'm burning to do more. The chamber music, the songs – as I get to know Weinberg better, each new piece is greater than the last. I think he will be an exploration for a whole lifetime.'

The connection seems so strong that it's tempting to ask whether she feels that her own heritage gives her a special empathy with Weinberg's music. Polish by birth, he spent much of his creative life in Soviet Russia, though his Jewishness made him a persecuted outsider in both countries. Gražinytė-Tyla is from Lithuania, a nation with deep cultural and political

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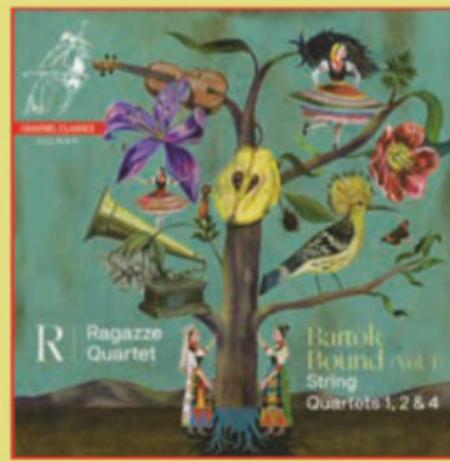


Mahler 7: The full journey from darkness to light with Iván Fischer and his BFO. A documentary of the recording is available on YouTube.
ccs sa 38019

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Gražinytė-Tyla and Kremer at the UK premiere of Weinberg's 21st Symphony, November 24, 2018, recorded live for release on her first disc for Deutsche Grammophon

links to Poland as well as a shared experience – as recently as her own childhood – of Soviet oppression.

'It very much feels like music from my part of the world, and therefore connected to a history and a culture and a mentality which are, in a way, closer to me than German or British culture. There is definitely something that the Slavic and Baltic nations – let's say the former Soviet bloc – have in common. I'm a huge fan of Dostoevsky, and time and again I find feelings emerging from his writing that I think are connected to our part of the world. There is this big, big darkness in Weinberg's music – these long pedals in the basses, the lowest notes. Every winter my grandmother says, "Ah, I can't stand it." You feel a helplessness in front of the darkness, which you must confront. And then on the other hand there is this June light, which bathes the whole country: the most idealistic, optimum light.'

And there's also a very particular Baltic musical tradition that's focused on choral singing. Gražinytė-Tyla's mother is a pianist, her father conducts the Aidija Chamber Choir in Vilnius, and in 1994, at the age of seven, she travelled with them to the International Eisteddfod at Llangollen, Wales, where the choir won the youth choir prize. For a long time, it looked as if that would be her own artistic destiny. 'I do play the piano, and I've played a little bit of violin and percussion – but in my youth, life was not possible without singing. I spent more or less every minute with my parents; they took me to their conducting lessons, their rehearsals, and on tour with choirs in a bus.'

Her first experiences on the podium (she studied in Graz, Bologna, Leipzig and Zurich) were initially as a choral conductor, and it's still an important part of her musical make-up. Her Birmingham plans include a re-creation of a Lithuanian communal song festival, and she cites Johannes Prinz, director of Vienna's Singverein, as an important mentor. But when another mentor, the Austrian conductor Wolfgang Bozic, mistakenly said to her in Graz, 'You *are* studying orchestral conducting as your main subject, aren't you?' artistic curiosity – a defining Gražinytė-Tyla trait – eventually got the better of her. A masterclass with Herbert Blomstedt encouraged her to enter the 2012 Nestlé and Salzburg Festival Young Conductors

Award, which she won. That led to opera jobs in Heidelberg and Bern, a Dudamel Fellowship in Los Angeles, and from 2015 to 2017 the post of music director at the Salzburg Landestheater.

In other words, she learnt her craft the way that Karajan, Walter and Klempner did, at the heart of the central European tradition. 'The first challenge in Salzburg', she says, 'was planning a season as part of a creative team: discussing ideas together, and finding out together what the common idea was, or could become. Of course, the focus was on operatic repertoire, and it was quite a challenge to find the right works, because the Landestheater, while very beautiful, has a tiny pit. There is space for a maximum of seven first violins.' Not *Elektra* then. 'Not *Elektra*. But I was listening to a lot of chamber operas, and also modern and 20th-century works. And, of course, I was thinking about Salzburg, and developing the conversation with that particular place and that particular audience.'

That way of thinking about an ensemble in the round – as a product of a specific time, place and community – made her perfect for Birmingham, where the orchestra is a part of civic life, with an expanding outreach and community brief. Gražinytė-Tyla has already worked with the CBSO's choruses, its youth orchestra and its sister organisation, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group. She's thrown herself into joint projects with the city's universities and conservatoire, and popped up – complete with the full orchestra – amid astonished rush-hour crowds at Birmingham New Street railway station. But all of that would be meaningless without the special energy that she generates on the podium at Symphony Hall. With Gražinytė-Tyla, something unexpected and illuminating occurs in every concert – whether she's replacing the soprano soloist with a boy chorister in Mahler's Fourth Symphony, rewarding the audience with a high-octane Ligeti encore, or (unannounced) prefacing Beethoven's Fifth Symphony with Purcell's March for brass and timpani from his funeral music for Queen Mary. The audience responds, the orchestra responds, and – as with Oramo and Sir Simon Rattle before her – that mutual trust creates a space for exploration. The Weinberg project, Roxanna Panufnik's choral epic *Faithful Journey* (2018), and *Fires* (2010),

an orchestral work by the Lithuanian composer Raminta Šerkšnytė (given its UK premiere in 2016), have all benefited from that shared spirit of adventure.

'Raminta is another artist who expresses this Baltic idea of darkness and light. We played *Fires* a few times on tour, and it grew into something very, very special. We always got enthusiastic shouts after that piece.' Music by Šerkšnytė – recorded with Lithuanian forces, as well as Kremerata Baltica – will feature on a future DG disc. But Gražinytė-Tyla is nothing if not open to new and different cultural experiences, and Birmingham has its own very specific musical tradition.

'Birmingham is full of surprises,' she says. 'It has this huge, wonderful heritage as an industrial city, but also as a musical centre. So many stars of the past came here – Mendelssohn, Sibelius, Dvořák and, of course, Elgar. We must build on that.' A disc of British music with the CBSO is on the cards, though it's unlikely, just yet, to feature Elgar. 'I'm fascinated by *The Dream of Gerontius*, the ideas speak to me – but I need to feel I know every word, like in an opera production.' She's particularly interested, however, in Ruth Gipps, a former oboist with the CBSO, whose Second Symphony was premiered in Birmingham in 1946; and Sir Michael Tippett, whose Piano Concerto (originally commissioned by the CBSO) she has already performed with Steven Osborne, and whose *A Child of our Time* she will record for DG in Birmingham next season. 'I just find Tippett very, very interesting, in terms of both thematic material and structure. Harmonically, the Piano Concerto is full of the most fantastic things, yet still it's very clear what is happening. *A Child of our Time* has a spiritual kinship with Weinberg's 21st Symphony. You know, right now in our world there are many things happening politically, and it's crucial to commemorate the tragedies of the past to make sure we don't repeat the same mistakes. *A Child of our Time* can have a role in this.'

'Birmingham's diversity is fantastic – the whole globe is focused here. And the CBSO has a youthful spirit, is open to new things'

Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem* features in her plans too, and, with the CBSO about to celebrate its centenary in 2020 with a series of major commissions and premieres (precise details are embargoed at time of press, though the plans I've seen will raise eyebrows), DG is unlikely to be short of 'unknown' and 'special' possibilities from Gražinytė-Tyla and her Birmingham team. If, that is, they choose to take them. As far as she's concerned, 'I want to record things that are particularly important for us – something with which we can make a special, unique impact.' For Gražinytė-Tyla, it's essentially about responding – as an artist – to the place and time in which she finds herself.

'The diversity of Birmingham is fantastic,' she says. 'In a way, the whole globe is focused in this city. I see it as a really big, very beautiful but huge challenge to reach our audience here. And maybe I say this too much, but this orchestra has a youthful spirit, in the sense of being open to things: being curious, wanting to discover new repertoire, new ways of playing known repertoire, and new ways of carrying out our role in society. Both the audience and the orchestra are incredibly supportive of their music director, and this is a privilege because it creates a feeling that we are on a journey together – a very wonderful journey.'

Gražinytė-Tyla's Weinberg CD with the CBSO is released on DG in May

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SINGING JOYFULLY FOR 40 YEARS

Since 1979, founder-conductor Harry Christophers has never lost sight of The Sixteen's mission to bring choral music to the wider public with uninhibited passion, he tells Lindsay Kemp

You can always be sure of a cheery welcome from Harry Christophers. As I enter the backstage room at London's Cadogan Hall – where this evening he is due to conduct Monteverdi's *Vespers* – he gives me the kind of good-natured hello you might get from someone you meet unexpectedly in the street rather than someone waiting to be interviewed about their work. He did it the first time I ever bumped into him – which actually *was* in a street, nearly 20 years ago in Palermo – and he is still doing it now as we sit down to discuss the ensemble he founded 40 years ago to perform Renaissance music, and

which is now one of the world's most famous concert choirs: The Sixteen.

As we talk about this significant birthday, it soon becomes easy to put two and two together and see that Christophers being quite possibly one of the nicest and most uncomplicated conductors in his profession has been a major factor in building the community he has with his choir. 'The aim from the start was that we loved this music and wanted to perform it. The fact that over the years people started coming to our concerts and enjoying them, together with our growing realisation that we should be bringing it to a wider public – well, it all developed

from there. But the basic principle of just loving what we were doing has never left us; it's been the whole nature of the group. They've been incredibly loyal to me, and I hope I've been loyal to them.'

In 1979, the Renaissance choral scene in Britain was rather different from what it is today. Now we see choirs of professional adult singers everywhere. In those times, the preferred performers of the music of Byrd, Palestrina and Victoria tended to be choirs of boys and men at colleges such as King's, St John's (both Cambridge) and Christ Church (Oxford), or at cathedrals such as Westminster. 'It *was* all very much collegiate-based back then,' Christophers agrees, 'and the only professional choirs specialising in this repertoire that I can think of were the Monteverdi Choir and the Schütz Choir. But then around that time Peter Phillips founded The Tallis Scholars, and then we started up. Mind you, it was all incredibly cavalier at first. In my day you could get into Oxbridge if you could sing, or play cricket, or act, or row, or play the organ. Nowadays you have to have three A*'s at A level, and you might not even get in then. (That's a nightmare for those choirs now, by the way.) But the level of professionalism in the music world has got better and better. Today, there are so many really good singers about, and you really have to be at the top of your game all the time.'

There can be few who would dispute that The Sixteen have long been a benchmark for choral excellence – flawless in ensemble and radiating a sound that combines the vocal strength and focus of the professional chamber choir with the tonal warmth that comes from precise tuning and a carefully honed choral blend. The macho edge heard from some other high-powered choirs is tamed by Christophers, who favours instead smooth contours and lovingly sculpted phrases. To see them performing live, furthermore, is to be acutely aware of the technical assurance and musical commitment of every one of the singers – indeed, notable former members include Sarah Connolly, Mark Padmore, Carolyn Sampson and Christopher Purves. But ensemble singing is an art in itself, and while the UK is not short of highly accomplished professional singers, selection is still a special skill.

'Obviously I book people whose voices I like,' Christophers explains. 'They're all incredibly musical and stylistically aware. But I've always encouraged people to express themselves – it's always been my policy to allow them to sing. That principle has never changed, but what I do think has changed is that the whole quality of voices has improved so much. The thing I noticed when we made a Christmas programme a few years ago and all the sopranos had a solo was that every one of those six sopranos had a completely different voice, there was no sense of them being uniform. But they also know how to sing with each other, support their colleagues and make it gel.'



The cheery Christophers pictured recently

It must be a hazardous task, I suggest, trying to find new singers who are both individual and able to fit in. 'When a new voice joins, you can always tell whether they're going to be there for just one concert or for the next 10 years. A lot of our key singers made their first appearance with us as a dep, and I remember Elin Manahan Thomas coming in in exactly that way – it was a Choral Pilgrimage concert live on BBC Radio 3 and she didn't put a foot wrong, her eyes were on me and communicating, and I thought, "Yes, that's the sort of person I want."

Christophers's own background was as a singer – at Canterbury Cathedral as a boy, at Magdalen College, Oxford, as a student, and then on the professional circuit in the late 1970s as a tenor at Westminster Abbey and with the BBC Singers, among others. So what was it that caused The Sixteen to come into being? 'Well, I didn't really know anything about Tudor music before I went to Oxford and was introduced to it by Bernard Rose and David Wulstan and by singing in The Tallis Scholars sometimes, and part of me was always thinking, "Actually, I'd really like to do this myself." We'd formed this fledgling group, and we thought it was time to do a London concert. So, like everyone else, we did a debut at St John's Smith Square; I remember doing Mundy's *Vox patris caelestis*.'

Not 'everyone else' is still here 40 years on, however. What does Christophers think made The Sixteen one of the survivors? 'As those early years went on, I realised that I thought there was something fundamentally missing from the way that Tudor music was being performed in public. It seemed to me

that it was always for this select few cognoscenti, when actually it needed to get to a much wider public. And that's basically been our mission over the years, to get a wider public and perform the music in a way that reflects what we're singing about. Nobody knows Latin any more, of course (most people don't even know what the words of the Mass mean), so somehow

we've had to inject what the words mean into the way we perform, and really interpret the music. Over the years I've also realised that, yes, this is great music, and actually a lot of it can be

interpreted in many different ways by different people. We performers all have our way, we all probably think we're right, but we all attract our own public, which is great.'

The Sixteen certainly haven't had much problem attracting a public in recent years. Their appearances with Simon Russell Beale in the BBC television series *Sacred Music* (2008 and 2010) have quite possibly made them the most famous choir in Britain. 'Thank you, BBC!' laughs Christophers. 'And the great thing is that we didn't have to dumb down. We could introduce people to this music by going so far in explaining it but without going totally over their heads. It's amazing the number of people who responded to that. Young people, too, especially when we

'I've always encouraged singers to express themselves. But they also know how to support their colleagues and make it gel'

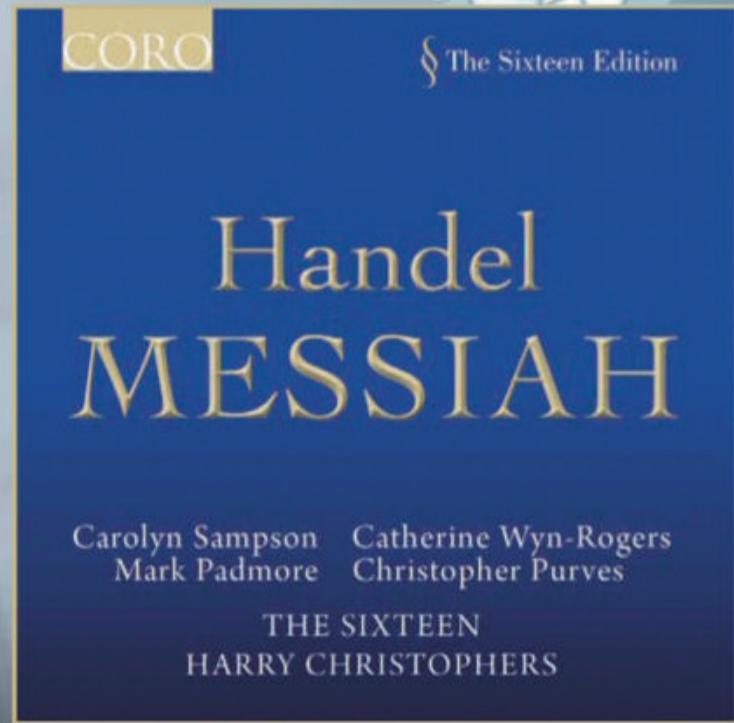
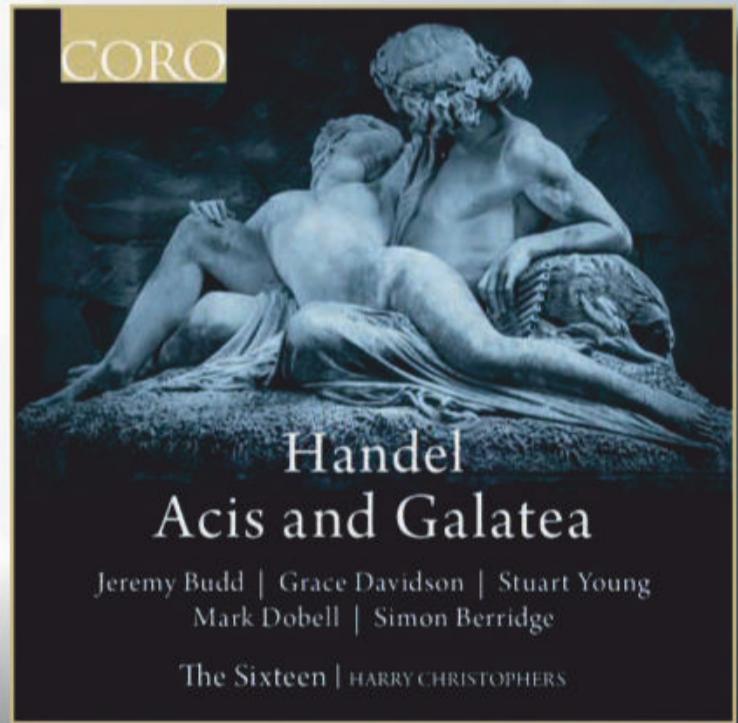
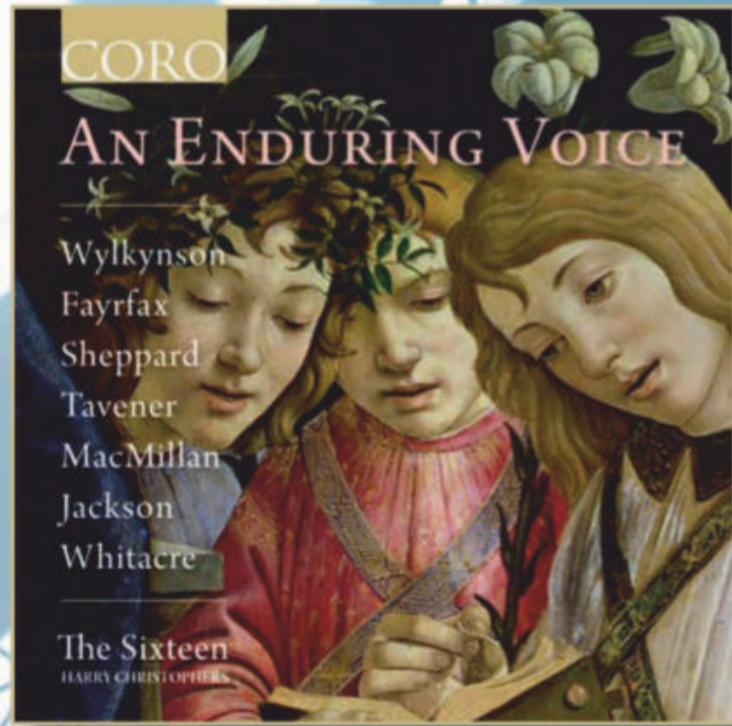
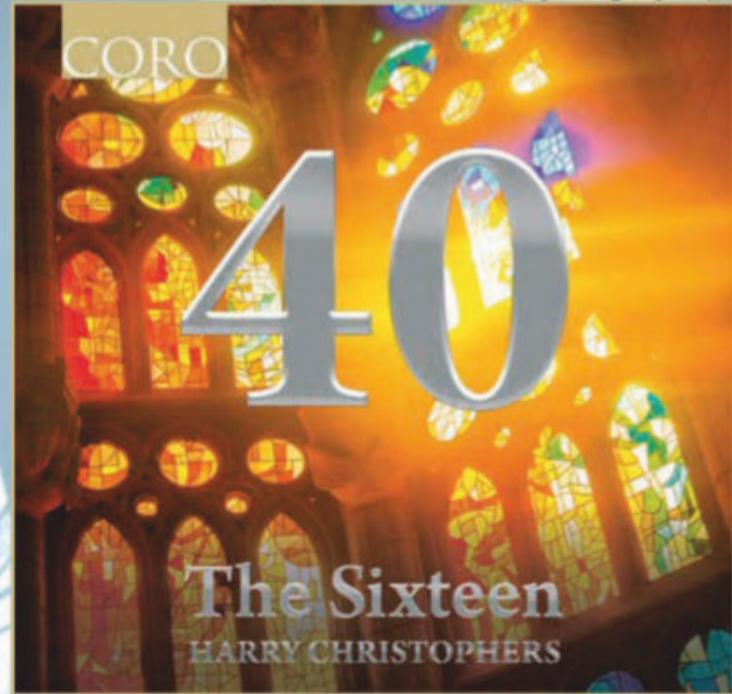
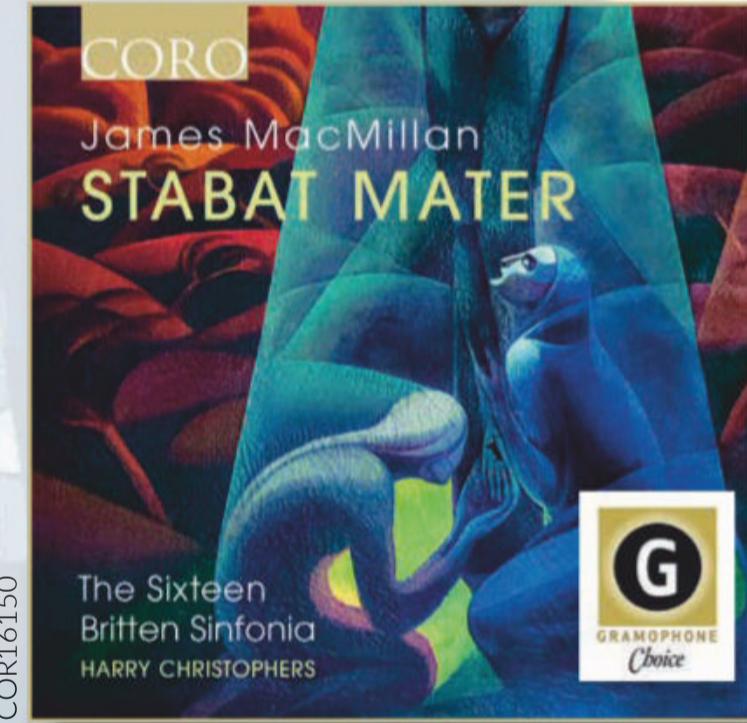
40 The Sixteen

HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

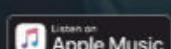
40 YEARS OF GLORIOUS MUSIC

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Early days: Harry Christophers (far left) with The Sixteen (including a young Mark Padmore, sixth from left) on the Barbican walkway in London, c1983

turned up in university cities. I remember once, when we were in Lancaster, a lad came up to us who had the Eton Choirbook box-set and said he listened to a bit of it every week. That's great, and he wasn't even a music student!'

But it's the Choral Pilgrimages – projects which each year since 2000 have toured a single well-honed programme to cathedrals and major churches throughout the country – that have proved the choir's most effective calling card. And with CDs from The Sixteen's own label Coro on sale at all the concerts, it's a tidy financial model too. Christophers describes it as a concept that emerged as a way of rationalising a period in the 1990s when the choir was almost chaotically busy in the recording studio. 'Everyone thought we were stark staring mad at first, but actually

here we are 19 years on still doing it at about 30 venues up and down the country. We're never going to go away from our policy of bringing this music to a wider public. You know, I'm not going to put in the Allegri *Miserere* every year to ensure bums on seats. And with the public that comes, it's always the music they were scared of that they go away talking about at the end. Last year it was Britten's *Sacred and Profane*; if there wasn't a group like us doing it, thousands of people would never hear it.'

He's right, as I witnessed for myself at a Choral Pilgrimage concert in York Minster in 2013 when the piece in question was the *Miserere* (2009) by Sir James MacMillan. 'Everyone needed to calm down afterwards, it was so emotionally moving,' says Christophers. MacMillan is a composer with whom The Sixteen have forged a special bond, and in 2001 he became the first composer to be commissioned by them. 'I wanted something for our next Choral Pilgrimage programme to go with some Robert Carver, and I phoned him up and said it would be wonderful to have a contemporary composition on the same text ('O bone Jesu'), and he said that would be fabulous because it means so much to Scottish Catholics (which I never knew!). We'd done music by other well-known composers who when they start writing vocally put high Cs for sopranos

pianissimo and low Cs *fortissimo*, and I really didn't want that – with our lot we'd have been calling for an ambulance! So we talked about that, and in this piece there's a phenomenal crescendo which happens towards the end and *feels* as if it starts in the basses on a bottom C, when in fact it doesn't – it starts on a G or something; and it *feels* as if the sopranos finish on a top C, when actually they finish on an A – and it's thrilling, so exciting. He really got it. And when he came to the rehearsals, in that moment we felt, "We commissioned you because we like your music and we're going to perform it to the best of our ability," and he thought, "Wow, they're really committed to making this as good as they can." Which sounds sort of obvious, but when you talk to so many composers about

their premieres, they often feel short-changed.'

The intensely moving *Stabat mater* (2015) – commissioned for The Sixteen by the Catholic philanthropist John Studzinski's Genesis Foundation – followed in 2016, and for the ensemble's 40th anniversary they have another MacMillan work to showcase in their 2019 Choral Pilgrimage. Entitled *O virgo prudentissima* (2017) and already available on their recent 'Star of Heaven' CD (Edward Breen described it in these pages – 1/19 – as 'sumptuous' and 'statuesque'), it is based on a fragment by Robert Wilkinson from the Eton Choirbook. Christophers simply calls it 'fantastic' and enthuses about its innovative and demanding choral textures: 'He's taken us to a lot of new terrains. Just like with Britten's music you think, "Will we be able to do this?" But in the end you can, and it's really, really rewarding.'

This year also sees the choir receiving a heavy-duty birthday present from MacMillan, again commissioned for The Sixteen by the Genesis Foundation, in the form of a choral symphony to be premiered at the Edinburgh International Festival on August 17. Featuring the combined forces of The Sixteen, their development choir Genesis Sixteen and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, it sets a Brittenish mix of biblical and poetic texts



'Every one of those six sopranos had a completely different voice': recording 'A Renaissance Christmas' at St Augustine's Church in Kilburn, London, mid-November 2017

in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and English. John Studzinski wanted something on the subject of the Holy Spirit, and originally it was going to be an oratorio, but then Jimmy said, "Well, actually, I'd like my fifth symphony to be a choral symphony." Entitled *Le grand inconnu*, it's 'mammoth!' says Christophers: 'Whereas in the *Stabat mater* the string writing was almost a cinematic representation of what was going on at the foot of the Cross, in the symphony the orchestral writing is incredibly vivid and active, everybody stretched to the *n*th degree of their artistry. The choral writing likewise, with lots of effects. But then there are unaccompanied chunks which are typical Jimmy. The big thing about his music is that because he's a believer he really gets to the bottom of things – there's an inner depth and emotion there. Spirituality applies to everybody, of different faiths and no faith, and emotions can't help but rise. Jimmy's music does that.'

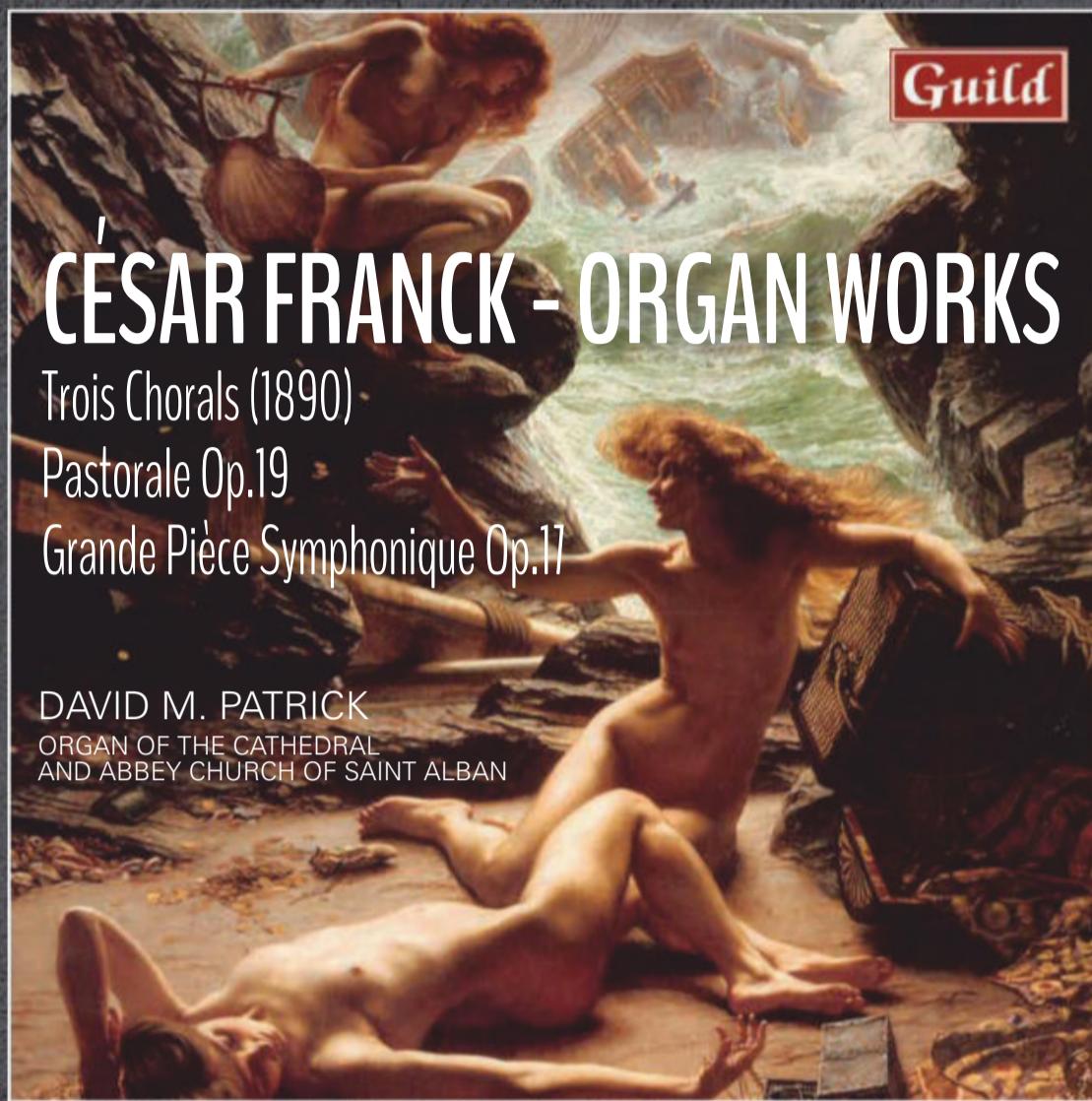
The Sixteen are not just an *a cappella* choir, of course, and over the years they have recorded much of the Baroque choral repertoire with their own orchestra. Handel has been a constant presence, and The Sixteen have recently released a new recording of *Acis and Galatea* ('I wanted to show off some of our singers as soloists') and will be performing a staged version of the oratorio *Belshazzar* at the Grange Festival between June 20 and July 6. 'I love doing opera. The nature of the beast is that I don't get much time to do it, but to have the choir involved in it as well is great. The orchestra is a very important part of our work, and they're bloody good! Coming from the singing world, when I started with period orchestras I was learning constantly from them, and still am. Those players know so much about the instruments and the repertoire, and I feed off it.'

And to round off the celebrations, there's *A New Heaven*, a book of interviews with Radio 3 presenter Sara Mohr-Pietsch to be published by Faber & Faber on August 15. 'Sara is amazing. She really has the ability to make me think about things. I always tend to think things just happen, but she would say to me, "Harry, things don't just happen, you must have made them happen!" It's quite therapeutic.'

So, hoping that Sara won't mind if I take a leaf out of her book, I try the Mohr-Pietsch technique: how *has* a man of Christophers's natural humility and apparent lack of authoritarian high-handedness made The Sixteen one of the best choirs in the world? True to form, he initially looks as if the question has never occurred to him. Then: 'Well, I suppose I'm lucky that I'm doing something I enjoy, working with this wonderful group. And being a singer myself, I know how to push them. I find performance exhilarating, because it's so spontaneous, and they have to be absolutely committed. I want their faces to be like actors on a stage, and if there are moments when I get at all dictatorial, that's the moment they stop doing that. I suppose it sounds flippant, but we have a lot of fun performing, and if the fun's taken out of it, the results are not going to be the same any more.' **G**

*The Sixteen's Choral Pilgrimage 2019 is now under way, and runs until October 26. They give the world premiere of James MacMillan's Symphony No 5 at the Edinburgh Festival on August 17, the US premiere of his *Stabat mater* at Lincoln Center, New York, on November 7, and perform Handel's *Messiah* at Westminster Cathedral on December 5. The Sixteen's 40th Anniversary Collection is out in May on CORO; visit <https://thesixteen.com>*

GUILD NEW RELEASES FOR SUMMER 2019



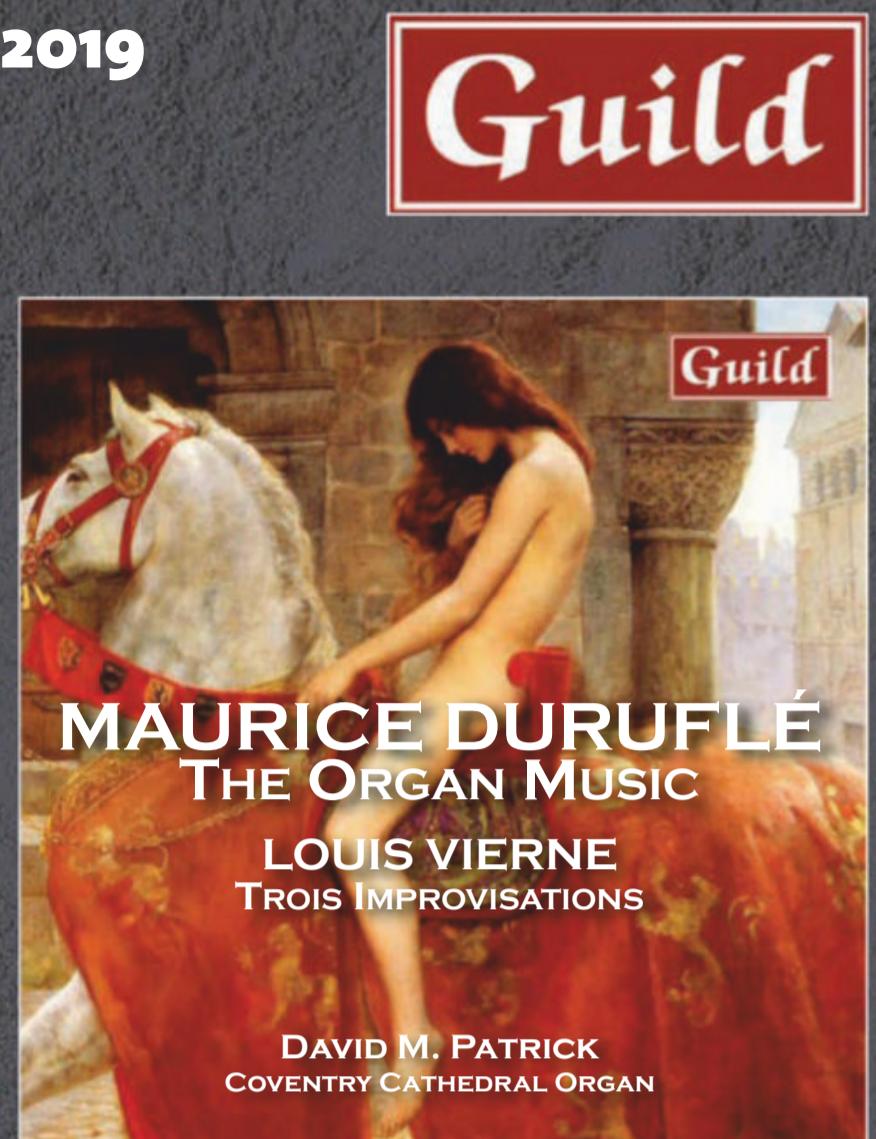
David M. Patrick's latest project is to record César Franck's organ music for Guild on the Harrison & Harrison organ of St Albans Cathedral. The first album contains some of Franck's greatest music, including the three Chorals, Pastorale and Grande Pièce Symphonique.

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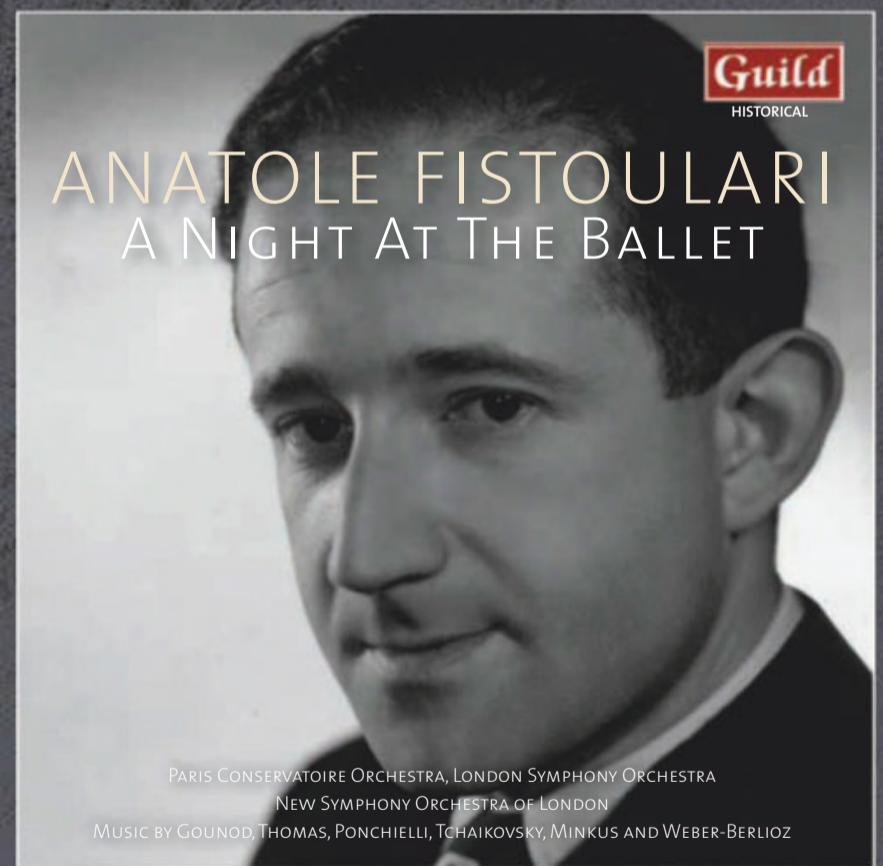
This is the first release on CD of the 1955 mono recordings of Gregorian Chant for Christmas and Easter by the Choir of the Monks of the Abbey of Saint Pierre de Solesmes conducted by Dom Joseph Gajard, O.S.B. With authoritative notes by Father Jerome F. Weber, this CD will appeal to scholars and enthusiasts alike.

GHCD 3503



A welcome return to the catalogue of David M. Patrick's celebrated recording of Duruflé's organ works on the organ of Coventry Cathedral. On its original release, the late Marie Madeleine Duruflé wrote to David, saying: "Vos interprétations des œuvres de M. Duruflé sont excellentes, je vous en félicite. ... bien ... Très bien ... brillant ... BRAVO."

GMCD 7804



The great Russian-born conductor Anatole Fistoulari, stalwart of British recording studios from the 1940s through to the 1970s, was a master interpreter of ballet music and Russian ballet music in particular. This CD includes the first complete release on CD of his 1950 LP of Gounod's Faust ballet music, Thomas's Mignon overture and Dance of the Hours from Ponchielli's La Gioconda. It also includes excerpts from Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake and Sleeping Beauty ballets.

GHCD 3502



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THE BEAUTY OF SOUND

As he releases a new Mendelssohn recording, Kristian Bezuidenhout tells **Harriet Smith** about his passion for period keyboard instruments

With his combination of laid-back charm and a mind as a sharp as a tack, it's impossible not to like Kristian Bezuidenhout – 'Kris, please.' As I fiddle with the recording device, he pours tea from a beautiful teapot. Pewter? 'No,' he laughs, 'silver, but very dirty; I prefer it this way.'

Prior to meeting up, I'd immersed myself in Bezuidenhout's solo Mozart recordings for Harmonia Mundi, of which I'd only heard a couple previously. What a fascinating insight they give into his close relationship with the composer. There's their sound world, for a start: a combination of carefully chosen instruments, bold yet apt ornamentation and a way of revealing the beauty of Mozart's melodies with complete naturalness. The rave reviews make perfect sense.

It's the kind of engagement that comes from long association with a composer, and for Bezuidenhout that was utterly tied in with his interest in earlier instruments.

'When I was growing up in Australia I just loved buying new CDs – these were very expensive, \$30 a time, so if a performance wasn't good it was so disappointing. In Mozart's anniversary year, 1991, I was obsessed with getting hold of the Philips complete edition, but of course, it was too pricey – but so beautifully produced! Around that time I started noticing other things – Sir John Eliot Gardiner's recordings of the C minor Mass and the Requiem; and his Mozart concertos with Malcolm Bilson on a fortepiano. I remember being so struck by the drama and intensity of the orchestral playing – it was *that* that made the initial impression even more than the early piano, which took me longer to get used to. It was clear that Malcolm was playing exquisitely beautifully, but the sound was a barrier to my ears, as I was reared on the modern piano. But the dialogue between keyboard and ensemble was so exciting!'

Bezuidenhout admits that although he was initially brought up on the modern piano, he never felt particularly attached to it. 'I was practising lots of music, especially Mozart, Bach and Haydn – I wasn't really drawn to later repertoire. And this ignited a fire in me, a desire to be connected to this field, and I felt that in order to do that I had to play early pianos.'

It was this desire that took him to the renowned Eastman School of Music in the US. Presumably, if he'd gone down a more conventional Juilliard School route his career path might have turned out differently?

'It was clear at Eastman that there were many more eccentrics running around – which was just right, as they let me do my thing! And it was there that I encountered Malcolm Bilson, which for me was like meeting royalty. He was so encouraging

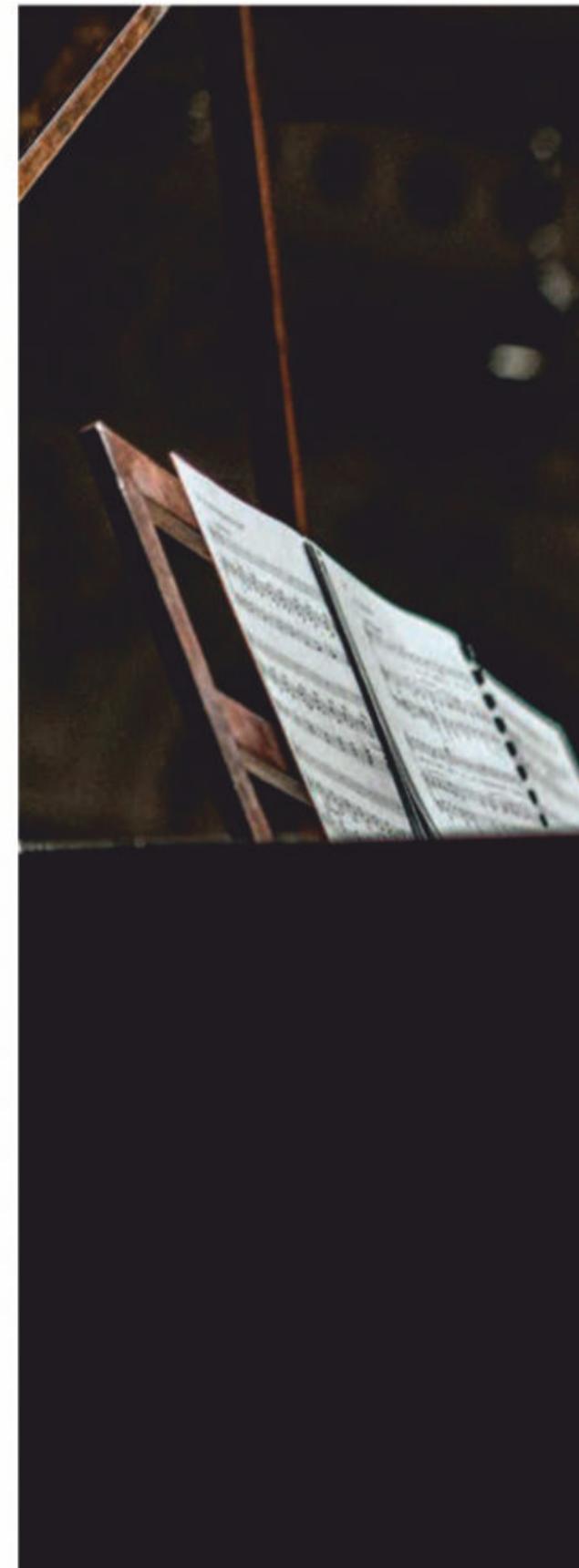
about playing these pianos – he really opened up an environment where you could experiment. And when I tried a Mozart sonata on one of the early pianos it was a complete shock. It was massively different from a modern one, and much harder to control.'

But rather than being daunted by the challenge, Bezuidenhout seems to have grasped it, quite literally with both hands. 'I said to myself, I can now go back and relearn all the Mozart sonatas, all the concertos that I've done up to now, and this piano is going to give me a tool for guiding my work. It really unlocked the world of old instruments for me. I started practising for mad hours on the five-octave especially, which is the hardest of fortepiano models because it's so exposed in Mozart and Haydn.' And it's that mad practice which has clearly paid off, allowing him such a close rapport with Mozart that he can take a score virtually as a blank canvas on to which he then puts his own mark with complete authority.

Also striking is the way that Bezuidenhout sounds equally at home on the harpsichord, as witness his recent ebullient accounts of Bach's accompanied violin sonatas with Isabelle Faust. He certainly challenges the received wisdom that harpsichord and piano do not mix, requiring from the performer such opposing techniques.

'I studied the harpsichord first, and did so very seriously for a couple of years. I'm thankful I did because it's a whole different universe of sound and control. I was fortunate to have Arthur Haas as my teacher – he used to work really hard on technical details, for which I'm very grateful.'

For Bezuidenhout, one of the most important aspects of harpsichords and fortepianos is that they allow a performer to find an emotional authenticity in the music being performed. 'I once had this amazing talk with Peter Sellars about the *St Matthew Passion* and one of the first things he said was:





"We need to get away from the idea that performance, great art, needs to be linked to questions of style, of how we play it." In a way, I couldn't agree less because for me style is *so* important – you can't be emotionally authentic if the style is a little bit off.'

I mention how much I dislike the Passions or cantatas such as BWV82 being treated as theatre, even with Sellars's manifest imagination: for me it gets in the way of the potency of the music – it's akin to dressing Bach in a miniskirt. Bezuidenhout nods his head and continues: 'When we're dealing with music pre-Beethoven, in particular, we need to combine that emotional authenticity with a rigour and logic about the musical decisions – you can really sense when these things come together. Someone like Isabelle is amazing in that respect, because stylistically her playing is beyond reproach, but it's also passionate and human.'

In a sense, Bezuidenhout (who turns 40 later this year) was born at just the right time. The pioneers of period-instrument

performance have already paved the way so we can now enjoy a consistently high level of both playing and instruments. It's also an era of inclusivity, in which period and modern instruments can coexist, with players allowed to swap between

them without being seen as traitors to the cause.

In Bezuidenhout's living room there's a handsome fortepiano built for him by arguably the most revered of today's makers,

Paul McNulty. And it was a McNulty fortepiano, based on one by Anton Walter & Sohn c1805, that he used for his recent disc of Haydn. In his fascinating booklet notes he talks of things that have shaped his thinking around a composer to whom he freely admits he feels less innately close than he does to Mozart. The first is the notion, put forward by Tom Beghin, of a Haydn sonata as a musical oration; the second is from a book by Annette Richards, *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque* (2001), which draws parallels between the musical fantasia and

This Érard offers a fascinating insight into Mendelssohn's style. You can almost taste the sounds when you play them'



Bezuidenhout enjoys directing performances from the keyboard and has recently been given roles with both the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra and The English Concert

18th-century English landscape design. If this seems initially a little fanciful, just think of the contrasts, beauty and unexpected vistas found in the work of both Capability Brown and Haydn himself, with his music's sudden shifts in key, changes of direction and startling silences.

'The Haydn was much more demanding than the Mozart because I had to reassess constantly what was going on by listening and adjusting tempo, colour or sound. Bob [Robert] Levin talks about how if you were to look at *The Marriage of Figaro* through a really high-end professional lens, everything would be completely in alignment: every aspect of this opera is perfect. But with Haydn, as a performer, if you don't get that lens in exactly the right alignment his music can seem a bit colourless. It's a bit like Japanese kabuki, where each tiny theatrical gesture needs to be so cared for, so that when they're put together in a loving whole the effect is very powerful. I've found something similar in Haydn sonatas. They can sound a bit bland, a bit lifeless and antiseptic, and I found myself playing in that way in the sessions, so I'd have to go back and listen and analyse what was off – whether this note needed to come later, or this phrase needed to have more magic around it. And then when you read about Haydn, it becomes clear that he improvised ideas and gestures at the keyboard and then wrote them down. Which is the opposite of Mozart, who was writing fully fledged ideas in real time. But good performance was very important to Haydn – he wrote to his publisher in relation to his German Songs that no one should "copy, sing or tamper with these songs, because after they're finished I will sing them myself in the best houses: a master must see to his rights by his presence and by true performance". In other words, Haydn is saying that his music has to be played well, otherwise people won't understand how good it is. I think that's true of Mendelssohn too.'

The evening after we met up, Bezuidenhout was making his LSO debut at London's Barbican, playing Mendelssohn's Concerto in D minor of 1823 for violin and piano with two colleagues with whom he has performed frequently: Faust and Gardiner. This work, together with the early (even by Mendelssohn's standards: it was written in 1822, when he was 13) A minor Piano Concerto, featured on his first Mendelssohn disc with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra. I mention how riveting I find his account of the A minor Concerto, which makes it far more believable than many others do. 'Thank you. That is such an extraordinary piece – I mean it's bonkers, but good bonkers. It has very special things in it, and remarkable textures. For that I used a copy of an 1824 Conrad Graf.'

For his new Mendelssohn disc, just released, he performs the mature Piano Concerto in D minor, Op 40, which is coupled with the First Symphony and the overture *Die schöne Melusine*, again with the Freiburg orchestra, this time under Pablo Heras-Casado. He explains, 'When Mendelssohn gave the premiere of the D minor Concerto in Birmingham in 1837 he used an Érard, so we found one from the same year, though it's not the same serial number ...' Shocking! '... I know! It'll be panned!' He breaks into laughter. 'It's a beautiful instrument from the collection of Edwin Beunk. And it offers a fascinating insight into Mendelssohn's style, because we don't have that much detail from the composer himself – he doesn't write much about ideas or visions of what the piano needs to do. But I think this Érard is a good match. It has an incredible lightness and ability to handle filigree, and it's possible to play very fast passagework in a dextrous way; but it also has this very nutty, warm quality which is different in each register. As in all of these old pianos, the topography of sounds from register to

register varies and it's so much fun to play because you feel these zones being combined – they have a life of their own and that becomes a real part of the texture. You can almost taste the sounds in this repertoire when you play them on these nice pianos.'

Life is going to get even more hectic for Bezuidenhout because he has recently become joint artistic director (with Gottfried von der Goltz) of the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, and principal guest director (a post created especially for him) of The English Concert – canny moves on the part of both ensembles.

In the case of the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, it was again recordings that provided the initial introduction for Bezuidenhout. 'The first recording of theirs that I got had on it choral works by Astorga and Durante, with Tom Hengelbrock and the Balthasar Neumann Choir. That was followed almost immediately by their Bach Mass in B minor, which I still think has some of the most amazing orchestral playing I've ever heard in that piece – it's just sensational. I think it's the combination of richness and a uniformity without sounding over-rehearsed. That's what's so special about the FBO: they work so hard, yet on stage they just throw it out there, leaving it to the gods, which is wonderful.'

'The fortepiano is the instrument I get paid to play in recitals and concertos, but it's not the limit of what I want to do'

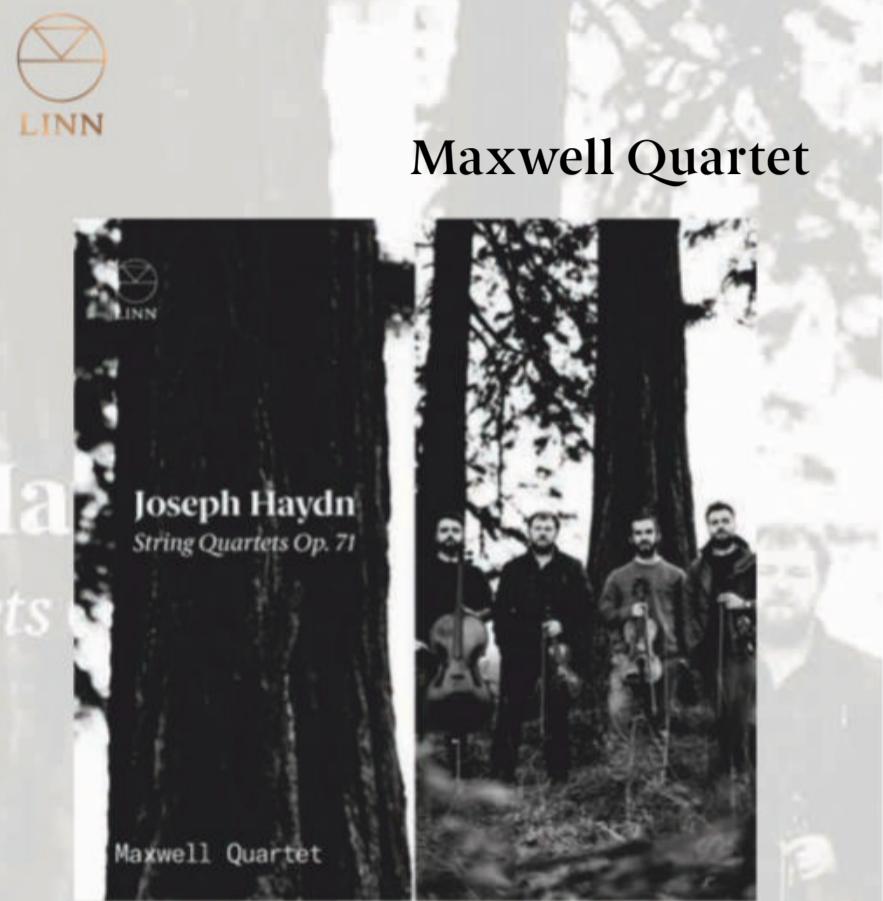
He has already recorded all the Beethoven piano concertos with the Freiburg orchestra, so watch this space. 'It was a kind of hellish but exciting experience because we did all of them in 10 days. I was so nervous about it, but although the process was harrowing I think it was also helpful to do it like this because the recordings have a kind of manic fear built into them. They're not at all like the Mozart recordings, which were much more Apollonian and relaxed because I had more time and I was doing all the editing myself.'

The appointment with The English Concert means, happily, more than the current one concert per season, with a programme of Mozart to look forward to in May. Certainly, plans are wide-ranging, from chamber music to full-scale symphonies.

'The fortepiano is the instrument I get paid to play in recitals and concertos, but it's not the limit of what I want to do – I want to get back to my roots and play more Bach and Handel, Louis Couperin and Purcell. Of course, Mozart is one of my all-time favourite composers, but so is Bach. So I'm planning to do a number of Bach Passions over the coming seasons, which I'll direct from the keyboard.'

So he's not tempted to eschew the keyboard and conduct the musicians involved? 'No, because I don't want to be the kind of conductor who just walks in and tells people to play – I want to play *with* my colleagues; I think that draws a very different style of playing from the band, because there's more risk involved – more attachment to the whole process, in a way. And I want to experiment with forces that are maybe more minimal than you might imagine for a B minor Mass or a *St Matthew Passion*. I've done that a couple of times with groups such as the Dunedin Consort, and I like very much the immediacy of that chamber-musical approach.' **6**

► To read our review of Bezuidenhout's new Mendelssohn disc, turn to page 42



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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Harriet Smith is swept away by Steven Osborne's revelatory accounts of Beethoven's last three piano sonatas, combining dramatic power and sublime intensity



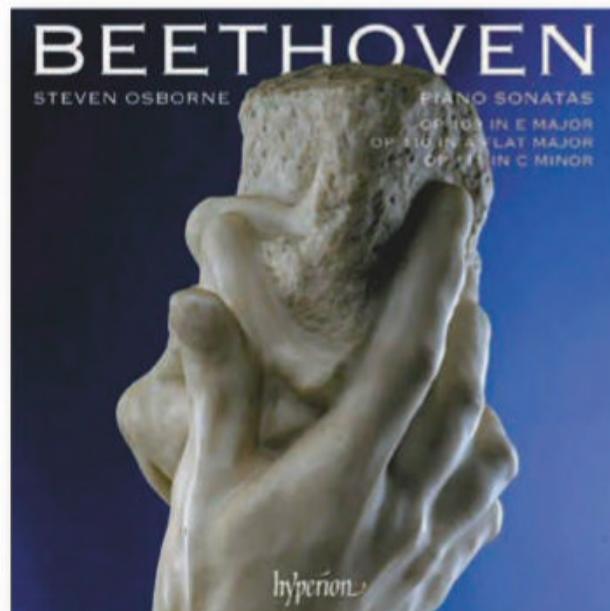
Beethoven

Piano Sonatas - No 30, Op 109;
No 31, Op 110; No 32, Op 111

Steven Osborne *pf*
Hyperion  CDA68219 (64' • DDD)

I was much looking forward to getting my hands on this CD, having chosen Steven Osborne's previous Beethoven sonata disc, featuring a dangerous and profound *Hammerklavier*, as my Critics' Choice in 2016. From the first note, Osborne's kinship with the composer is everywhere apparent and he conveys the vast contrasts of the last three sonatas unerringly.

When I was doing a *Building a Library* on Op 109 last year for BBC Radio 3, I was looking for a combination of wonder and fantasy that didn't tip over into late Romanticism in the first movement, fearsome firepower without edge in the *Prestissimo* and a Classicism to the theme of the finale's variations. And that is exactly what we get here. Sample Osborne's way with the theme of the finale: it has an outward simplicity from which the variations can grow, yet listen more closely and you'll detect the endlessly varied colourings and subtle changes of dynamics and phrasing, making the repeats truly developmental. Impressive too is the way the variations unfold with complete inevitability: from the octave right-hand leap in the first, which is given without mannerism, via the perfect accord between the hands in the dotted articulation of the second, which contrasts beautifully with the more extended line of the third. The fugue has an almost gleeful quality to it and the closing minutes, in which Beethoven envelops the line in trills, is very well gauged, leading to a reprise of the finale's opening theme



'The endlessly varied colourings and subtle changes of dynamics and phrasing make the repeats truly developmental'



Osborne's range of sonorities is faithfully captured in Perth Concert Hall

that is moving in its guilelessness. Altogether this performance is on a par with Richard Goode's.

What is particularly winning about this new set is the way Osborne occupies the very different world of each sonata with equal conviction, which is by no means always the case, even with indubitably great pianists. Uchida, for instance, convinces me far more in Op 109 than in Op 111. And last month I found Yevgeny Sudbin better in Op 110 than in the last sonata. He, however, completely pales alongside Osborne in Op 110. Just a few moments comparing the two in the second movement demonstrate the point: whereas Sudbin had a tendency for agogic distortions, Osborne has a fire-and-brimstone intensity to his playing. Even Levit, whom I much admire in all three sonatas, pales by comparison here. Lewis finds a similar sense of the extremes of the music, though he doesn't relish the clipped *fortissimo* writing to quite the same degree. And in the *Adagio ma non troppo* momentum never sags, even though the sense of desolation is manifest. Here, and throughout, there's a sense of Osborne simply letting the music sound, rather than imposing himself on it. The fugue starts unobtrusively and the outbursts of ire have tremendous power. Levit is similarly dramatic here, his accompanying figuration a little less defined – choice is really down to taste.

Anyone who has heard Osborne's visceral recording of the *Hammerklavier* won't be surprised to find a similar combination of muscularity and extreme delicacy in the opening movement of the last sonata. But again there's a sense of an underlying Classicism; and, after



Power and conviction: Steven Osborne combines muscularity and delicacy in late Beethoven

a *Maestoso* introduction full of sharp edges, there's an absolute inevitability and clarity to the *Allegro con brio* with plenty of *appassionato* thrown in. His pedalling is a masterpiece of subtlety and I like the clipped chords, which are angry but laced at times with a kind of grim pleasure. The ferocity with which he maintains and builds momentum from 5'56" is darkly thrilling. And the ending has a quietude that makes what comes next sound entirely inevitable.

The theme of the Arietta has, like that of the finale of Op 109, an innate sense of stillness and Osborne is every bit as compelling as Goode in the way the variations unfold, growing naturally so that the duetting hands sound as one in the second, while the boogie-woogie third has plenty of character without sounding out

of place as it can do; the return to quiet of the fourth has a whispered inwardness. The trilling in the closing couple of minutes has its own range of emotion, from fragility to a sense of peace, and with the ending comes the requisite sense of the sublime. In this Osborne is assisted by a very natural recorded sound.

Steven Osborne has made many outstanding recordings but this is certainly among his finest. A magnificent achievement. **G**

Sonatas Nos 30-32 – selected comparisons:

Goode (3/94) (NONE) 7559 79328-2

Uchida (5/06) (PHIL) 475 6935PH

Lewis (6/08) (HARM) HMC90 1909/11

Levit (11/13) (SONY) 88883 70387-2

Sonatas Nos 31 & 32 – selected comparison:

Sudbin (4/19) (BIS) BIS2208

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue



Orchestral



Andrew Mellor on Sir Mark Elder's live Shostakovich Fifth Symphony: 'In the finale Elder gives himself plenty of room to execute the full acceleration mathematically plotted in the score' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**



Richard Bratby dips his feet into Smetana's symphonic poems: 'Svárovský and the Slovak Philharmonic go at the music with vim and a certain swagger' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 49**

Beethoven

Piano Concerto No 2, Op 19^a.

Triple Concerto, Op 56^b

^bGordan Nikolitch *vn* ^bTim Hugh *vc*

^aMaria João Pires, ^bLars Vogt *pf*

London Symphony Orchestra / Bernard Haitink

LSO Live (M) LSO0745 (67' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Barbican, London,

^bNovember 26 & 27, 2005; ^aFebruary 17 & 21, 2013

From ^bLSO0578 (6/06); ^aLSO0245 (download)

Beethoven

Triple Concerto, Op 56^a. Choral Fantasy, Op 80^b

^aAlexandra Conunova *vn* ^aNatalie Clein *vc*

^aDavid Kadouch *pf* ^bBertrand Chamayou *pf*

^bSandrine Piau *sop* ^bAnaïck Morel *mez*

^bStanislas de Barbeyrac *ten* ^bFlorian Sempey *bass*

Accentus; Insula Orchestra / Laurence Equilbey

Erato (F) 9029 55057-3 (53' • DDD)

Recorded live at La Seine Musicale, Paris,

^bApril 20, 22 & 23, 2017; ^aFebruary 17 & 18, 2018



This new LSO Live disc brings together two of Bernard Haitink's previously released recordings, presumably in honour of the conductor's 90th birthday. Pires's 2013 reading of the B flat major Concerto, while poised and polished, is strikingly short on muscle and daring. Accents and sforzandos are smoothed over, draining the finale of its youthful jocularity, and she even manages to tame the first movement's wild cadenza. But there's recompense in lyrical passages, where Pires's exceptional sensitivity illuminates. She makes magic at the end of the *Adagio*, for instance, by taking seriously to heart Beethoven's instruction to play with *gran espressione*. And Haitink has a few revelations of his own. Note how he relishes the gentle, aching dissonance created when the horns enter in the orchestral introduction to that same movement.

The Triple Concerto, originally issued with Haitink's Beethoven symphony cycle,

Rfinds a happier balance between refinement and vigour. The expansive opening movement is flexibly paced and seems to range over a wider emotional territory than usual – listen starting at 13'20" for a lovely sample of the musicians' collective suppleness. The rapt, dreamy atmosphere of the *Largo* is beautifully realised and the finale conveys the requisite swagger. Cellist Tim Hugh shows some occasional strain in his part's high-lying passages but on the whole the solo trio are excellent.

Erato's disc comes from concerts recorded at La Seine Musicale, an architecturally striking new performance space on the Île Seguin, west of Paris. Laurence Equilbey's approach to tempo is considerably less pliant than Haitink's but her crackerjack period-instrument orchestra play with character and gusto. The solo team in the Triple Concerto, too, are extremely fine. David Kadouch uses an 1892 Pleyel that displays a glorious combination of clarity and warmth. Violinist Alexandra Conunova and cellist Natalie Clien, who use gut strings and are sparing with vibrato, have impeccable intonation. Indeed, Conunova's tone glistens like sun on the waves of the Seine itself. If only the microphones had not been placed so close to the soloists. Not only is the balance unnatural but there's hardly any play of light and shade, something that comes through in the LSO recording despite its rather dull sound.

The *Choral Fantasy* is even more oddly balanced. Pianist Bertrand Chamayou is so closely miked that there's no sense of him playing softly at all. His piano trills here come across more like alarm bells. Interpretatively, he's quite straightforward – always musical, but there's little sense of fantasy. Accentus, Equilbey's superb choir, and the fresh-voiced solo group are all in fine form. Perhaps the engineers need time to figure out the auditorium's acoustics – the *Choral Fantasy* was recorded at the venue's inaugural concerts. It's a pity, in any case. Neither performance would be a top recommendation but both communicate a real sense of joy. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Beethoven

Symphonies - No 6, 'Pastoral', Op 68;

No 8, Op 93

Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Philippe Jordan

Solo Musica Wiener Symphoniker (F) WSO16

(65' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Goldener Saal, Musikverein, Vienna, May 17 & 18, 2017



This has been, to date, a most distinguished Beethoven cycle, with keen-eared music-making, vividly and unobtrusively conducted, winning golden opinions in these columns and beyond. Recorded live in Vienna's Musikverein in the late winter and early spring of 2017, the symphonies have so far been released chronologically concert by concert. Which raises the question, what happened on May 17 and 18, 2017, when, for the first time, a note of hysteria appears to have crept into the proceedings?

This is at its worst in the finale of the Eighth Symphony with which the concerts presumably ended, though the symphony's first movement also has moments when the orchestra appear caught in the toils of their own frenzy. Orchestras can, and do, 'take off' in performance. 'They were out in the woods today', Nikisch would say of his Berlin Philharmonic. Still, wonderfully as the Vienna Symphony has been playing during Jordan's tenure as chief conductor, it is not the Berlin Philharmonic. The Berliners don't muddle phrases or race ahead of the beat as the Vienna players occasionally do on the wilder shores of this performance of the Eighth.

Two years prior to this Vienna cycle, Jordan filmed all nine symphonies with the orchestra of the Paris Opéra (ArtHaus Musik, 12/16). It was a distinguished cycle, though there, too, the performance of the Eighth Symphony didn't entirely work; not because it was overdriven but because it was too sedate. Jordan's view has clearly evolved, though without the orchestra



Character and gusto: Laurence Equilbey conducts Beethoven live from La Seine Musicale, with a superb line-up of soloists

having had time to gather in all the notes at the speeds he now requires.

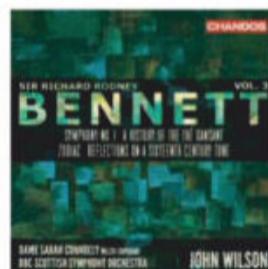
His reading of the *Pastoral* Symphony has also evolved, though with rather more agreeable results. If the Paris *Pastoral* was a joy from start to finish – the leisurely emanations of an alert but contented mind – the new performance is a good deal more urgent in both gait and gaze, with Jordan sending forensically searching glances deep into the musical shrubbery as he hurries by.

There are the makings here of a revelatory reading of the *Pastoral*, a work that never stops giving. Even so, there are places in this particular performance which could have done with more consideration (the string colloquies at the start of the ‘Scene by the Brook’) or been given more breathing-space. I think of Jordan’s none-too-jolly fairgoers seemingly rushing for cover even before the storm arrives.

Richard Osborne

Richard Rodney Bennett

‘Orchestral Works, Vol 3’
Symphony No 1. A History of the Thé Dansant^a.
Reflections on a Sixteenth Century Tune. Zodiac
^aDame Sarah Connolly *mez*
BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra / John Wilson
Chandos (F) CHSA5230 (65’ • DDD/DSD • T)



As each instalment of John Wilson’s recorded tribute to his friend and mentor

Richard Rodney Bennett is revealed, the realisation (to those of us who didn’t already know) that this extraordinarily complete musician could do absolutely anything becomes more and more apparent. This third volume showcases a piece dedicated to Wilson himself and might well be the reason I return to it again and again.

Reflections on a Sixteenth Century Tune is Bennett’s *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* and was inspired by what Bennett called Wilson’s ‘way with strings’. In another universe altogether, it’s what has always given the John Wilson Orchestra its stylistic lustre. Josquin Desprez may be a long way from Gershwin or Rodgers but Wilson knows instinctively what Bennett heard in the tune and how he wished to journey with it. The handful of variants seem to hover around an especially lovely Warlock-inspired section where Bennett pits a solo quartet against muted strings. It’s the most ‘composerly’ music

imaginable and feels effortless, though Bennett insisted it wasn’t – and it’s beautifully played by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, who clearly understand what it means to the conductor. The final ‘fade to black’ resonates long after the sound has disappeared.

Tucked in between the purely orchestral works is a revealing trio of settings for voice of three poems by Bennett’s sister Margaret (Meg) Ruth Peacocke entitled *The History of the Thé Dansant*. They are essentially three postcards from the edge – ‘Two Foxtrots and a Tango’ might be the subtitle – suggestive of the physical and emotional ‘distance’ felt by the Bennett siblings towards their parents. We are in the realms of 1920s decadence (the images of travel calling to mind sleek ocean liners and perhaps even Bennett’s beloved *Orient Express*) and the composer’s way with classy pastiche underscores fanciful, almost Sitellesque texts which Sarah Connolly enjoys as much for the sound of the words as for their meaning. The closing bars of the final setting unlock a ravishing and entirely unexpected horn-led postlude which is a classic instance of Bennett’s gift for the lyric creeping up on you and quietly breaking your heart.

The First Symphony – an LSO commission from 1965 – and *Zodiac*



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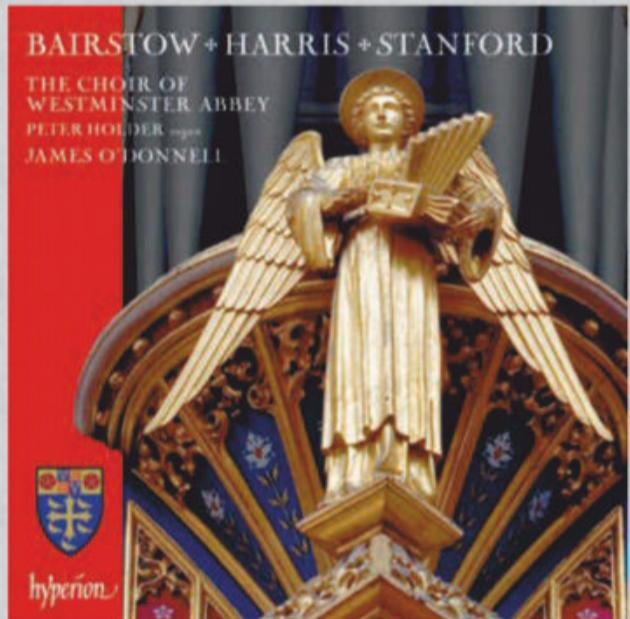
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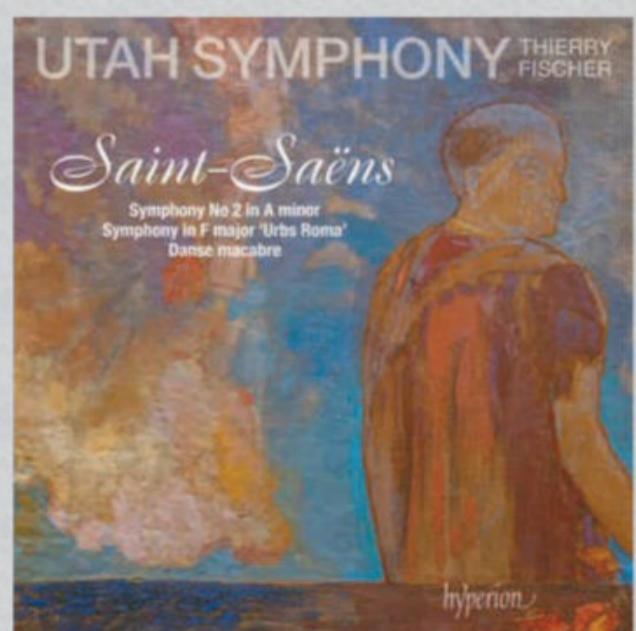
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Paavo Järvi completes a distinguished Brahms cycle with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen

have much in common. The outer movements of the symphony – sinewy, bracing, and in the finale capricious – are like serial Walton. Meaning that it wears its serialism lightly. It's music of great panache shot through (most especially in the climax of the first movement) with a hint of filmic melodrama. The slow movement is dedicated to Bennett's soon to be long-term partner Dan Klein and is possessed of sighing lyricism and speaks of a soul newly romanced. It has a Bergian depth of expression and reach that is quintessentially Bennett. It could hardly sound more like a testament to true love.

Zodiac – an astrological showpiece dedicated to Elisabeth Lutyens – whisks us through the seasons and related star signs in a series of jewelled miniatures that behave like a concerto for orchestra. Nothing to do with horoscopes or Russell Grant but they shine brightly. Bennett's own star sign, Aries, is unusually assertive. Now, there's a surprise. **Edward Seckerson**

Brahms

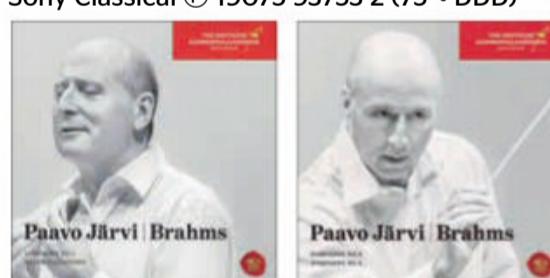
Symphony No 1, Op 68. Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op 56a
Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen / Paavo Järvi
Sony Classical F 19075 86955-2 (63' • DDD)

Brahms

Symphonies – No 3, Op 90; No 4, Op 98

Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen / Paavo Järvi

Sony Classical F 19075 93753-2 (75' • DDD)



For what it's worth, the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen can boast as strong a claim as any other modern ensemble to resemble in size and sonority the Meiningen Court Orchestra which gave many Brahms performances admired by the composer himself. And what is it worth? Only the Fourth was written to be premiered in Meiningen, whereas the Vienna Philharmonic gave more first performances of his orchestral works than anyone else.

Nonetheless, only if sheer density of string tone counts as a *sine qua non* will these performances disappoint. There's certainly no lack of weight or impact to the First Symphony's opening bars. RCA's studio engineering fairly represents the sound of the orchestra from a mid-stalls

perspective, with a little extra telling help given to the bassoons in support of a lean but strongly projected bass section.

Paavo Järvi's direction, too, is unusually successful at recreating live and contingent drama in studio conditions. Divided violins play their part, notably in the struggles of the finales to Nos 1 and 3, but throughout the ensemble and indeed all three symphonies the quality of voice-leading raises them above most modern rivals, large or small. Everyone knows where they are going, and how to get there.

Järvi allows the pulse to relax without slackening tension during the most searching passages of development sections. His handling of rubato within comparatively swift basic tempos places him in the lineage of Toscanini and Boult back to Fritz Steinbach – perhaps Brahms's most favoured conductor for his symphonies – and it's complemented by the most natural handling of string portamento that suggests this much-abused expressive device is finally being understood from within rather than applied from without by modern orchestral string sections.

When Steinbach visited London in 1902 with his Meiningen men, one review reported that 'the conductor seemed to be recreating rather than giving a rendering'

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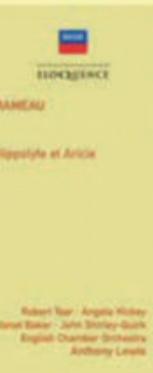
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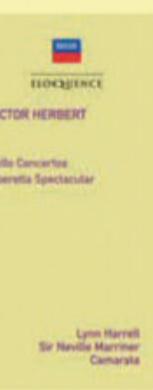
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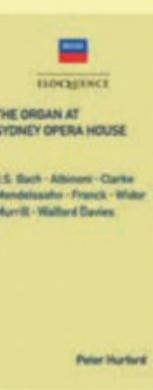
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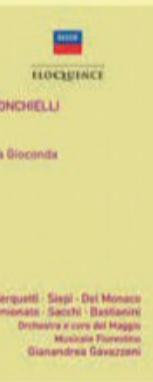
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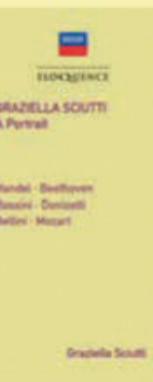
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Gianandrea
Gavazzeni

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Recital**
Anita Cerquetti

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Lorin Maazel;
Christoph
von Dohnányi

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of the symphonies – and, worth noting, ‘with a spirit of romance’. It is this spirit that lends such unaffected but sincere charm to the First Symphony’s *Andante sostenuto*, and to the delicate pointing of the *Haydn* Variations. The *Poco allegretto* of the Third is another wistful delight, untroubled by laboured intimations of mortality, led as if by the solo winds, with the conductor leaning just a touch into the major/minor fluctuations of the Trio before stilling all his players for a moment of profound, late-Schubertian contemplation.

Indeed, Järvi’s account of this, the most notoriously tricky personality of the symphonic quartet, gets better and better as it goes on. Without imitating Gardiner’s headlong rush into the finale’s abyss, Järvi encourages his players to throw caution to the winds – though the end could be quieter: Brahms’s *piano* here (most beautifully balanced in the strings) is a much more rounded and contented creature than the same dynamic that opens the Fourth, now full of nervous tension.

Once past a forthright and comparatively straitlaced exposition – again, there are notable precedents for this approach from the conductors referenced above – this Fourth steadily builds in stature. Indeed, the most controversial point of the cycle as a whole may be the imposing rallentando to clinch the first movement, so different from the pell-mell accelerando favoured by Gardiner and others (but not, apparently, by Brahms himself).

One singular editorial choice is the pair of solo violas opening the recapitulation of the Fourth’s slow movement (at 5'28"), carrying here the flavour of *Liebeslieder* waltzes (there is a BMG Toscanini Collection album that makes precisely this point by shrewd juxtaposition). Gardiner got there before him, but Järvi conducts the softly drooping wind quavers as an accompaniment to the *divisi* viola melody rather than the other way around. Despite some noble individual contributions from flute, horn and trio of trombones, the finale never quite transcends its passacaglia framework of Baroque severity to reach the pitch of ineluctable destiny achieved by the First and Third. Taken in the round, however, I’d place Järvi’s cycle above its most comparable rivals in Mackerras (Telarc, 10/97), Berglund (Ondine, 8/01) and Ticciati (Linn, 4/18). Brahms for our time, certainly, but then Brahms is for all time.

Peter Quantrill

Bruckner

Symphony No 6

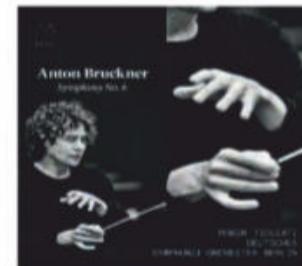
Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin /

Robin Ticciati

Linn  CKD620 (52' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin,

February 10-12, 2018



After many years of being the least appreciated and performed of

Bruckner’s mature symphonies, the Sixth seems to have finally joined the mainstream. As well as being increasingly heard in the concert hall, helped by the advocacy of conductors such as Barenboim, Rattle and Salonen, it also enjoys a growing discography, this Linn release being no less than the fourth recording of the work to come my way for review in as many years.

Ticciati, in his first recording of a Bruckner symphony, directs a fleet and lithe account of the score. His penchant for swift tempos is at odds with Bruckner’s indication of *Majestoso* at the start of the first movement, however, and although he gives the second subject group all the space it needs, his observance of the *accelerando* marking at bar 191 (7'32") results in the music sounding slightly harried at this point. Nevertheless, the performance conveys considerable vitality, and captures the essence of the noble and aspiring coda.

The interpretation of the *Adagio*, delivered with a steady pulse and considerable depth of feeling, is very persuasive. The orchestral playing combines expressiveness and sensitivity, the contribution of the cellos especially fine. Ticciati’s tempo for the Scherzo is arguably faster than the score’s indication of *Nicht schnell* suggests but the result is energetic and involving, and the crisp, almost martial phrasing of the horns in the Trio works very well.

In the finale, Ticciati demonstrates a strong feel for the character of the contrasting subject groups but here I feel the performance falls slightly short of the grip and dynamism needed for the movement to make its full effect. For those qualities, try the recordings by Wand with the same orchestra (Profil, 4/12) or Paavo Järvi (RCA, A/15), both of whom conclude the symphony with a blaze of energy that’s hard to resist. **Christian Hoskins**

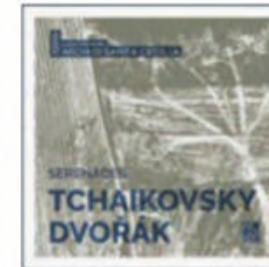
Dvořák • Tchaikovsky

Dvořák Serenade for Strings, Op 22 B52

Tchaikovsky Serenade for Strings, Op 48

Archi di Santa Cecilia / Luigi Piovano

Arcana  A457 (58' • DDD)



It’s difficult to imagine an album coupling these two works not being an

enjoyable listen. And so it proves with this release from the strings of Antonio Pappano’s Rome band. Luigi Piovano, who conducts, is principal cellist of the orchestra (although the only biography in Arcana’s booklet is for the artist Mario Giacomelli, whose pictures are dotted throughout) and, with generous if somewhat top-heavy forces at his disposal (8.7.4.3.2), he directs big-boned, full-bodied accounts of both works – symphonic in scale and sonority.

It’s an approach that seems to fit the Tchaikovsky work best, with that memorable opening statement given real stature. There’s a sturdiness to the first movement’s *Allegro moderato*, plenty of lilt in the famous waltz and a touching, heartfelt account of the *Élégie*. And Piovano’s massed forces negotiate their way around the finale pretty nimbly, too. But the sound itself can feel a little glassy and slippery, and it’s not all quite as tight as it could be. Perhaps it’s unfair to compare the performance with that of the smaller Russian Virtuosi of Europe, but there you can hear the advantages of more lightness, detail and precision.

There’s a lot to like in Piovano’s performance of the Dvořák, too, including a lovely account of the *Larghetto* and plenty of nice interpretative touches. But the sound again occasionally feels a little too congested, the playing not ideally clean. I miss the air and affection that makes Jakub Hruša’s lovingly turned account with the Prague Philharmonia, for example, such a delight. Nevertheless, the vigour and commitment of Piovano and his players are never in doubt on this enjoyable release.

Hugo Shirley

Dvořák – selected comparison:

Prague Philh., Hruša (4/07) (SUPR) SU3932-2

Tchaikovsky – selected comparison:

Russian Virtuosi of Europe, Zhislin

(5/16) (ORCH) ORC100052

Elgar

Variations on an Original Theme, ‘Enigma’, Op 36. In the South (Alassio), Op 50. Serenade for Strings, Op 20

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra /

Vasily Petrenko

Onyx  ONYX4205 (67' • DDD)



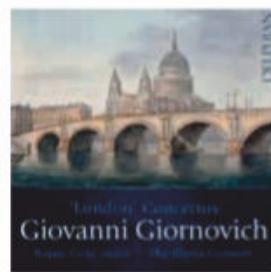
Vasily Petrenko directs an admirably trim, affectionate and cannily paced *Enigma*, free of fussy intervention and marked by superb orchestral playing. For proof positive of Petrenko's selfless insights, listen to the penultimate variation and marvel at the ear-pricking mystery of the principal clarinet's quotation from Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*. Plaudits, too, for Petrenko's gloriously punchy, unbuttoned way with 'WMB', 'Troyte' and 'GRS', and a finale which is as purposeful as it is nobly integrated. Elsewhere, 'Nimrod' comes close to the ideal in its flowing, deeply humane and unaffected progress, and I love the balletic point of the enchanting interplay between winds and strings in 'Dorabella' – one is reminded afresh of the influence of Delibes and Tchaikovsky (and the theme-and-variations finale from the latter's irresistible Third Orchestral Suite in particular). Ian Tracey's organ contribution towards the close has been most judiciously integrated into what is an agreeably ripe and detailed sound picture.

If anything, the performance of *In the South* is even finer, exhibiting an emotional clout, malleability and sweep that effortlessly activate the goosebumps. Not only does Petrenko revel in the opulence and giddy technical flair of Elgar's orchestration (the passage marked *con fuoco* beginning at fig 26 or 10'05" has a thrilling physicality and swagger about it), he also draws out every ounce of songful glow from the achingly tender secondary material and wistful central reverie. Like Martyn Brabbins (Hyperion, 11/16) before him, Petrenko achieves a wondrously expectant hush at the *tranquillo* marking at fig 51 (20'24") to cap a deftly woven reading of abundant temperament, heart and charisma.

Only the Serenade underwhelms: for all the RLPO strings' delectably articulate response, there's too little sense of wide-eyed wonder, and the sublime *Larghetto* singularly fails to touch to the marrow the way it always does on, say, Sir John Barbirolli's famous 1962 recording (Warner) or Norman Del Mar's below-the-radar 1968 Bournemouth SO version (available on a British Composers twofer coupled with both Elgar symphonies under Barbirolli and Constantin Silvestri's combustible *In the South*). Still, the disc as a whole warrants investigation for the two main items alone. **Andrew Achenbach**

Giornovich

'London Concertos'
Violin Concertos - No 13; No 14; No 15.
Air: *Villageoises de Julie*
The Illyria Consort / Bojan Čičić vn
Delphian Ⓜ DCD34219 (66' • DDD)



Giovanni Giornovich (1747-1804) was perhaps born at sea, definitely baptised in Palermo, probably held a French passport and certainly appeared as an admired travelling violin virtuoso in most of Europe's concert-loving cities, including London (where he was a soloist in Haydn's first concert in 1791). When Bojan Čičić was growing up in Zagreb, he was told that Giornovich was Croatia's 'very own Mozart', although in fact it is only his surname that links him to a country he seemingly never set foot in. But if that is what inspired Čičić to get this recording together, we should be grateful, for these three concertos from around 1790, while hardly matching Mozart's standards, are good examples of the kind of attractive orchestral fare that entertained the audiences of the day – fluent, balanced, pleasingly melodic, if not memorably so, and filled with athletic but well-turned virtuosity.

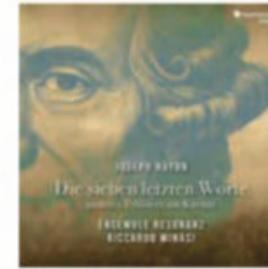
Stylistically they are conventional, even though Giornovich makes a few mild structural experiments; the Romance-style slow movement is apparently his invention. No 13 ends on a tonic chord but leaves the violin holding the fifth, an oddly inconclusive moment that was perhaps intended as a launching pad for solo improvisation – an encore without waiting for the audience to applaud, as it were. Čičić places one of Giornovich's airs and variations here, a move that really gives you a whiff of the atmosphere of the Classical-period concert hall. And indeed that glimpse of a lost performing world and its forgotten music is the main appeal of this CD as a whole. Concerto No 14 is stocked with Russian tunes, guaranteed to stir curiosity among its listeners.

Čičić is a clean and assured soloist, well on top of the technical, often high-lying writing Giornovich puts his way. The tone of his period violin will sound thin to people used to modern-instrument Beethoven Romances, but it doesn't take long to adjust. The Illyria Consort is a small orchestra without sounding particularly so on this recording, but the location, a church in Summertown, Oxford, is vulnerable to outside traffic noise,

making some of the edits conspicuous. Still, this disc is well worth hearing, especially for fans of the Classical period. **Lindsay Kemp**

Haydn

Die sieben letzten Worte, HobXX:1a
Ensemble Resonanz / Riccardo Minasi
Harmonia Mundi Ⓜ HMM90 2633 (64' • DDD)



One of Haydn's oddest commissions came from a church in Cádiz for a sequence of orchestral 'sonatas' depicting each of the seven 'words' uttered by the crucified Christ. 'It was no easy task to compose seven *adagios* lasting 10 minutes each, and to have them succeed one another without fatiguing the listener', wrote the composer. Such were his powers of invention by the mid-1780s, however, that the listener's attention is gladly paid to this hour-plus of music marked *largo*, *lento*, *grave* and *adagio*; and, indeed, the *Seven Last Words* was soon performed throughout Europe and published in saleable arrangements for solo keyboard and for string quartet – the version in which it is most commonly heard. (A version with chorus, which is occasionally performed, dates from a decade or so later.)

In fact the original orchestral score comes out far less often than the solo and chamber versions, so this new recording from Ensemble Resonanz is doubly welcome. First, because of the chance it offers to relish this rarity from Haydn's high maturity as a symphonist. Second, because of the finely nuanced performance it receives. The strings have a particular sparkle as captured within the stonework of a reasonably spacious Hamburg church, while the woodwind offer consoling balm: for example in the second sonata, 'Today you will be with me in paradise', or singing descants over the 'dry' strings in the fifth, 'I thirst'. The final 'Il terremoto' ('Earthquake') – marked *Presto, con tutta la forza* – at last releases the tension, like a summer storm, trumpets and timpani heard for the first time in the work.

Jordi Savall recorded the *Words* on period instruments in the very church in Cádiz for which it was written but Minasi's reading scores for its greater tightness of ensemble and a richer sound, stemming from a slightly larger string section. Savall also includes brief Gospel readings (in Latin) between each sonata, a feature absent from the new recording. Reviewing the previous disc, Richard Wigmore remarked that the *Seven Last Words* should

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David Threasher

Selected comparison:

Concert des Nations, Savall (12/07) (ALIA) AVSA9854

Hummel · Mozart · Rossini · Winter

Hummel Bassoon Concerto, WoO23 Mozart

Bassoon Concerto, K191 Rossini Bassoon

Concerto Winter Bassoon Concertino

Jaakko Luoma bn

Tapiola Sinfonietta / Janne Nisonen

Ondine (F) ODE1324-2 (69' · DDD)



Pity the poor bassoon, imprisoned in the depths of the woodwind section, usually let out only for brief comedy turns, famously drawn by Gerard Hoffnung with a chimney sweep's brush poking out of its bell. Of course, such characterisations only tell part of the bassoon's story. Gifted players, both amateur and professional, inspired a steady stream of virtuoso works for the instrument, demonstrating its versatility across a wide range – its gruff bass opening out into a plaintive treble – and its facility for wide melodic leaps and tricksy passagework.

Perhaps an hour or more in the bassoon's company might present itself as a slightly monotonous prospect. Not in the hands of Jaakko Luoma, principal bassoonist of the Tapiola Sinfonietta, who exploits all the personality intrinsic to the instrument in a programme of four works spanning a little over 70 years. The Mozart is well known, as is the Hummel (not least its perkily Haydn-esque finale), but the Rossini and Winter works are more rarefied fare. Mozart and Hummel cleave to the usual sequence of a fairly serious *allegro*, an aria-like slow movement and a far lighter finale, the latter work barely reaching beyond the expressive bounds of the former, despite the gap of 30 years that separates them.

Peter von Winter, though, is a composer whose music, on this showing, demands far more attention. His single-movement Concertino is in C minor, with all the *Sturm und Drang* fervour that entails. If the central barcarolle section and jaunty finale don't follow through on the seriousness with which the work sets out, the concertino is nevertheless something out of the ordinary in the context of the company in which it is presented here. Rossini's Concerto is a typical confection from the period of his long retirement, replete with the *cantabile* and coloratura familiar from his operas.

Luoma is a genial guide throughout, demonstrating the instrument's expressive possibilities and surmounting every challenge presented in these four works. Even if you don't feel the need for another disc of the Mozart or the Hummel, this is a rare chance on disc to hear the Rossini and – even more so – the wonderful Winter. **David Threasher**

Mahler

Symphony No 10

(compl & arr Michelle Castelletti)

Lapland Chamber Orchestra / John Storgårds

BIS (F) BIS2376 (77' · DDD/DSD)



Erwin Stein's arrangement of the Fourth set the precedent for attempts to compress and deconstruct Mahler that have more recently included two chamber versions of the Ninth and Matthew Herbert's 'Mahler X'. From the discomfiting way that the strings of the Lapland Chamber Orchestra slide down icy portamentos into yawning glissandos during the opening minutes of the *Adagio*, you might anticipate that here is another experiment designed at once to domesticate and disorient. But Michelle Castelletti's arrangement doesn't turn out like that.

Having taken Deryck Cooke's completion as the basis for her edition, Castelletti slims down the orchestra, not the argument, insinuating that in his later works Mahler was already engaged on a project of deconstructing himself. Meanwhile John Storgårds always cultivates legato, connects notes and episodes, privileges coherence over discontinuity and reminds us that the composer's sketches preserved at least a single thread of melody running through almost the entire symphony. Outstanding throughout, hornist Ilkka Puputti lends a glowing aurora borealis to the *Adagio*'s piercing cry of anguish. Taken very slowly indeed, the coda itself inches its way towards provisional closure as if (rather plausibly) Mahler was beginning his last and in many ways most radical symphony by rewriting the finale of the previous one.

The stylistic ground of the first Scherzo is more uncertain, pitched (again not inauthentically) somewhere between Johann Strauss, Schoenberg and Shostakovich, and decked out with gaudy triangle and cymbal trappings in the manner of Rudolf Barshai's Soviet-tinted orchestration. But it works. There is the

lazy drawl of an authentic Mahler scherzo about Storgårds' refined direction, the queasy movement between waltz and march, between nostalgia and parody. The orchestra play as if they had just broken off rehearsals of the Fifth.

Castelletti's version passes one important Mahlerian test insofar as it sheds a wan light of revelation on previous symphonies. The 'Purgatorio' sounds more than ever like a caustic rewrite of 'Von der Jugend' from *Das Lied* (hardly an original observation: Cooke himself made this comparison back in 1961). Borrowed from the Eighth as well as the arrangements made for the Society for Private Musical Performances by Schoenberg and his colleagues such as Stein, piano and harmonium fill out the more problematically fragmented textures of the second Scherzo, while Storgårds recaptures the whirling nihilism of *Das Lied*'s opening song with much teasing rubato.

Cooke himself saw the Tenth as finally affirmative but Castelletti's telling use of tam-tam in the coda recalls the closing section of the *Pathétique* Symphony – another Mahlerian touchstone – and offers only the most fragile consolation. However you hear the Tenth, you'll hear it differently after experiencing this one.

Peter Quantrill

Mendelssohn

Piano Concerto No 2, Op 40. Symphony No 1,

Op 11. Die schöne Melusine, Op 32

^aKristian Bezuidenhout fp Freiburg Baroque Orchestra / Pablo Heras-Casado

Harmonia Mundi (F) HMM90 2369 (63' · DDD)



Among a flurry of Mendelssohn piano concerto recordings in recent months, the direct competitor to this new one will be Ronald Brautigam's with the Cologne Academy under Michael Alexander Willens. He used a copy (by Paul McNulty – who else?) of an 1830 Pleyel, while Kristian Bezuidenhout's instrument is an *echt* Érard from seven years later. In terms of piano sound, Bezuidenhout's perhaps sounds closer to what one might expect of a modern piano. It's capable of a wide range of colours and dynamics, holding its own against the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra but producing a beautifully veiled tone in the central *Adagio*.

In terms of the playing, however, contrasts in approach are more marked. Bezuidenhout is the more inward of the two, a quality noted in his recent disc of Haydn piano sonatas (3/19); as happy to



Clare Hammond unveils attractive concertos by Josef Mysliveček with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra and Nicholas McGegan

allow his passagework to rumble away within the body of the orchestra as he is to muse on more lyrical sections. The recording is slightly more spacious, regarding the ensemble in a sonic panorama, than the more spotlit BIS recording. That suits the unshowy approach of these players, especially when you realise how much of the concerto is marked *piano* and *pianissimo*.

The Freiburgers are on fine form, too, under Pablo Heras-Casado. This disc completes their cycle of the symphonies with the First, played with the *Sturm und Drang* turned up to 11, highlighting its lineage back through Beethoven's C minor moods to late Mozart, especially the tortuous chromaticisms and counterpoint of the G minor Symphony, K550. The string sound, bleached of vibrato, contrasts vibrantly with the warmth of the winds, most notably the clarinet of Lorenzo Coppola, who once again comes into his own in the fairy-tale overture *The Fair Melusine* – a delicious dessert after the two minor-key heavyweights that precede it.

David Threasher

Piano Concerto No 2 – selected comparison:
Brautigam, Cologne Academy, Willens
(2/19) (BIS) BIS2264

Mysliveček

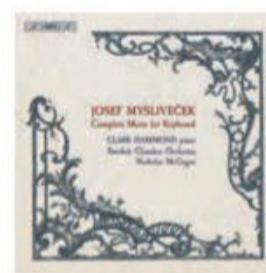
Keyboard Concertos^a – No 1; No 2.

Six Easy Divertimenti. Six Easy Lessons

Clare Hammond *pf*

Swedish Chamber Orchestra / Nicholas McGegan

BIS (F) BIS2393 (77' • DDD/DSD)



Josef Mysliveček (1737–81) was 26 years old when he left his native Prague for Italy, where he studied with Pescetti in Venice and, a mere two years later, had the first of his two dozen or so *opere serie* produced. Italy would remain the centre of his activity – with three sojourns north, to Prague, Vienna, and Munich – until his death of tertiary syphilis at the age of 44. In addition to his operas, there are some 45 symphonies, eight violin concertos, oratorios and a substantial amount of chamber music. Mysliveček apparently composed relatively little for the keyboard and virtually all of it that survives is presented in this attractive new recording by Clare Hammond.

The two concertos are thought to date from Mysliveček's Munich sojourn in

1776–78 and, despite the considerable richness of the orchestral writing, the solo parts are considerably less demanding technically than Mozart or Clementi and less audacious than Haydn. Modest though their means may be, their charm is abundant, and both concertos are clearly the works of a supremely competent and gifted musician, if not of a keyboard virtuoso. To Hammond's credit, she lets this appealing music speak for itself, never yielding to the temptation of burdening it with undue portent or extraneous affect. Nicholas McGegan and the Swedish Chamber Orchestra (which will celebrate the 25th anniversary of its founding next year) are her supportive collaborators. The exquisitely poignant *Larghetto* of the F major Concerto, with its delicately coloured accompaniment of muted violins and pizzicato lower strings, is alone worth the price of the disc.

The two solo sets are clearly intended for the amateur market. The longest of the *Six Easy Divertimenti* (1777) is just over three minutes. The more elaborate *Six Easy Lessons* (1780) are a set of two-movement sonatas which, with but one exception, join a lively opening movement with a more relaxed finale. Here too Hammond

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Nepomuceno

Symphony in G minor. *O Garatuja* - Prelude.
Série Brasileira

Minas Gerais Philharmonic Orchestra /

Fabio Mechetti

Naxos (B) 8 574067 (69' • DDD)



Although virtually unknown outside his native land, Alberto Nepomuceno (1864-1920) is one of the luminaries of Brazilian music. He composed his *Série Brasileira* ('Brazilian Suite', 1891) while studying with Brahms's friend Heinrich von Herzogenberg in Berlin. The four-movement suite is absolutely delightful and quite original in its way. Nepomuceno's influences are readily apparent: the opening movement's depiction of dawn in the mountains seems to draw on the 'Scène aux champs' from Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* as well as Wagner's Forest Murmurs. Yet the music also looks ahead, and sometimes in startling ways, as at 2'13" with its fragrant foreshadowing of Debussy's tone-painting of daybreak in *La mer*. In the third movement, lilting wooziness simply and effectively evokes the languid charm of napping in a hammock, while the final Batuque's vigorous, syncopated rhythms – drawn from an Afro-Brazilian dance – is unlike anything in European music at that time (the closest parallel might be Gottschalk's *A Night in the Tropics* of 1859).

I find the suite far more successful than the G minor Symphony (1893), although the latter gets top billing on the CD cover. It was written around the time Nepomuceno married a student of Grieg's and was befriended by the Norwegian composer. The back of the disc trumpets Brahms's influence, and although there are some distinctly Brahmsian moments – the play of two against three in the lovely second theme of the *Andante quasi adagio*, for instance – there's just as much Schumann and Wagner. I rather like the unexpected mix of Beethoven and Bizet in the Scherzo but in general there's not quite enough of Nepomuceno himself.

The lack of individuality is especially noticeable when one turns to the lively prelude to *O Garatuja* (1904), Nepomuceno's unfinished comic opera. Here, the rhythms dance, the folk-

inflected melodic material is fresh, and a wealth of harmonic and colouristic detail tickles the ear. The entire programme is played with panache by the Minas Gerais Philharmonic, who sound far more polished and mature than one would expect from an orchestra founded just a decade ago.

This is the first instalment in what's promised to be a 30-disc survey of Brazilian music, a joint project between Naxos and the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. If subsequent volumes maintain the high standards heard here, we have a lot to look forward to. Urgently recommended.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Reger

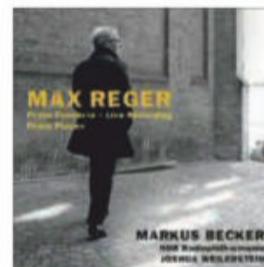
Piano Concerto, Op 114a. *Episoden*, Op 115

Nos 1-5. *Lose Blätter*, Op 13 - No 2, Choral

Markus Becker pf

^aNDR Radiophilharmonie / **Joshua Weilerstein**

AVI-Music (F) AVI8553933 (58' • DDD)



Markus Becker's love affair with Reger's piano oeuvre first manifested itself on CD with the complete solo piano music, initially issued by Koch in a handsome wooden box (long prized by the present writer) and now available at budget price from Brilliant Classics. Becker has the requisite touch to bring this endlessly fascinating music to life, gnomic exemplified in the current context by the solo pieces Opp 13 and 115, where he implies parallels between Reger and Brahms. It's beautiful playing, every gesture sounding entirely natural. The Brahmsian axis is even more obvious at 4'16" into the Concerto's first movement, by which time Reger has modulated his way into the second idea, bringing with him unmistakable allusions to Brahms's B flat Concerto.

The work opens to a crescendoing timpani roll and a darkly clouded initial *tutti* before the soloist announces himself with a virtuoso flourish. Here Becker faces formidable competition from Marc-André Hamelin (under Ilan Volkov), whose superb 2010 rendition places the concerto securely among the genre's Romantic masterpieces. Trawling through available digital versions, Hamelin is the biggest player, while Gerhard Oppitz (under Horst Stein in a 'Max Reger Orchestral Edition' 12-disc set) offers marginally more breadth – his slow movement is glorious – and Becker projects the most

obvious sense of play, especially in the finale, where his teasing rubato is quite unlike anyone else's. Barry Douglas is another worthy exponent, coupled, like Hamelin, with Strauss's *Burleske*, though he's not quite so characterful as either Becker or Hamelin. You can, however, access his deeply affecting way with the slow movement via YouTube.

What I particularly like about this new recording is the way it promotes the idea of a concerto that has long been lived in, though Becker's candid booklet note reveals initial doubts about the work ('so many notes, all the dense chords ...'), doubts triumphantly overcome, given the evidence. As to 'historic' options, three spring immediately to mind, Rudolf Serkin under Eugene Ormandy (Sony) and two impressive versions conducted by Hans Rosbaud with the pianists Erik Then-Bergh (APR, 2/17) and Eduard Erdmann (Orfeo, 10/07), the latter especially commanding in his first entry. But both Becker and Hamelin are credible digital front-runners, Becker the athletic thinker, Hamelin the thinking athlete. Joshua Weilerstein, like Volkov for Hamelin, seems at one with Reger's plush, thick-set orchestral idiom and NDR's sound is excellent. **Rob Cowan**

Piano Concerto – selected comparisons:

Douglas, French Rad PO, Janowski

(9/98) (RCA) 09026 68028-2

Hamelin (5/11) (HYPE) CDA67635

Oppitz, Bamberg SO, Stein (DG) 479 9983GM12

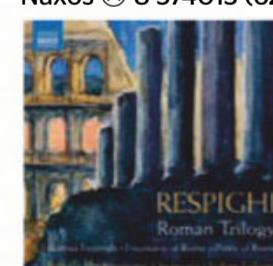
Respighi

'Roman Trilogy'

Feste romane. Fontane di Roma. Pini di Roma

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra / JoAnn Falletta

Naxos (M) 8 574013 (62' • DDD)



It's now some 10 years since JoAnn Falletta and the Buffalo

Philharmonic gave us their first Respighi disc, a programme of comparative rarities (*Vetrate di chiesa*, *Impressioni brasiliene* and *Rossiniana*) much admired in these pages on its first release (2/08). For its effective successor, they've turned to the familiar Roman Trilogy, in performances of considerable insight that are particularly strong in their attention to detail and colour.

Falletta and her orchestra are often at their most persuasive when Respighi is at his most reflective. The woodwind solos that open *Fontane* twine ravishingly round each other, while the final section

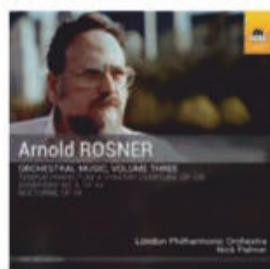
sounds very melancholy as the sun sets over the Villa Medici. The mandolin serenade that closes 'L'Ottobrata' in *Feste romane* is all amatory nostalgia, exquisitely done. Time suddenly stands still, meanwhile, when we reach the Catacombs in *Pini*, where the distant trumpet seems to hover eerily in the air and the penumbral strings suggest deep, reverential awe. The Gianicolo movement – slow and very sensuous indeed – is genuinely magical.

Elsewhere there are a couple of lapses. The tramp along the Appian Way at the close of *Pini* builds impressively but doesn't quite leave you feeling overwhelmed as it can and should. The recording itself is finely engineered if fractionally recessive, though brass and timpani become too dominant at the climax of the Trevi episode in *Fontane*, and we consequently miss the adrenalin rush of the string arpeggios that give the passage its extraordinary élan. *Feste romane*, in many ways, works best here, largely because Falletta's judgement of the score's difficult mix of beauty, drama and violence is particularly acute.

She's less interested in decibels at the start than in the way the brutality of the Circus Maximus becomes more horrific as the movement progresses. The later sections sound very Stravinskian with their *Noces*-like bells, harmonic abrasion and garish juxtapositions of the lofty and the demotic. It's an interpretation of great intelligence. The competition for the Trilogy as a whole is, of course, stiff, and this doesn't eclipse the achievements of, among others, Jansons (EMI, 3/97), Pappano (EMI, 11/07) or John Neschling (BIS, 3/07). But it's a fine bargain version, and *Feste romane* is certainly well worth hearing, if you care for the work itself. **Tim Ashley**

Rosner

'Orchestral Music, Vol 3'
Symphony No 6, Op 64. Nocturne, Op 68.
Tempus perfectum: a Concert Overture, Op 109
London Philharmonic Orchestra / Nick Palmer
Toccata Classics (CD) TOCC0469 (59' • DDD)



This is Toccata Classics' fourth CD of music by the American Arnold Rosner (1945–2013), and I think it is the best so far. Previous issues have established Rosner's compositional landscape and style, a synthesis of elements stretching from the Middle Ages to late 20th-century

postmodernism: modal harmony, pre-Bachian counterpoint, free tonality and a sound world of late-Romantic opulence.

The earlier orchestral volumes (there is also a chamber disc, TOCC0408) focused on a variety of works defining Rosner's range, from his Second Piano Concerto to the harrowing *From the Diaries of Adam Czerniakow* (every bit as powerful as *A Survivor from Warsaw*; TOCC0436), to the ingenious and most striking *Unravelling Dances*, a deliciously 'mad', arhythmic bolero (TOCC0465). This new release presents two powerful utterances separated by the delightfully freewheeling *Tempus perfectum* (1998), an orchestral canzona in 9/8 time. The orchestration and modal harmonies may suggest Hovhaness to some listeners, but – as with those of Vaughan Williams in the darkly atmospheric Nocturne (1978) – these are fleeting; much more important is the way the music develops, in directions quite unlike either of those forebears.

The back-cover description of the 38-minute Sixth Symphony (1976) as 'monumental' might seem a little over-the-top (the term is more usually applied to Mahler's, Bruckner's or the longer Shostakovich symphonies), but when you hear Rosner's music you will understand exactly why. The monumentality here is not about length or even orchestral power, of which it has bucketloads, but expressive content. The symphony has a feeling of immensity, from the outer movements' volatility to the central *Adagio*'s 'troubled calm', to the turbulent climax and spent coda. The performances by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Nick Palmer are eloquent and virtuoso in equal measure, and Jonathan Allen's sound is unobtrusively sensational. Strongly recommended.

Guy Rickards

C Schumann • Herz • F Hiller • Kalkbrenner

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 78'
Herz Rondo de concert, Op 27 F Hiller
Konzertstück, Op 113 Kalkbrenner *Le rêve*,
Op 113 **C Schumann** Piano Concerto, Op 7
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra / Howard Shelley pf
Hyperion (CD) CDA68240 (64' • DDD)



By coincidence, I am reviewing this new recording of Clara Wieck

Schumann's Concerto in A minor as the city of Leipzig begins a year-long celebration of her bicentennial and having just heard news of the death of her great biographer, Nancy B Reich, in upstate New York.

One of the best-known portraits of young Clara depicts her at the age of 15, elegantly clad in an off-the-shoulder gown, her face the epitome of relaxed composure, with her left hand resting on a piano keyboard and a copy of the Op 7 Concerto open on the music desk. Howard Shelley and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra offer a compelling account of what would remain the young composer's most ambitious work. Succinct though the concerto may be, with three linked movements totalling 21 minutes, the technical challenges of the solo part are considerable. Shelley meets these with characteristic aplomb, including an especially nice collaboration with cellist Sue-Ellen Paulsen in the slow movement's cello obbligato. The *alla polacca* finale, the concerto's first-composed and most developed movement, is imbued with the appropriate dash and hauteur.

This 78th instalment of Hyperion's 'Romantic Piano Concerto' series includes what might be considered three addenda to previous releases. Hiller's rather wooden *Konzertstück* supplements Vol 45 of the series, consisting of that composer's three concertos; Vols 41 and 56 are extended by Kalkbrenner's somewhat less than dreamy *Le rêve*. Herz's *Rondo de concert*, supplementing the composer's eight concertos in Vols 35, 40 and 66, exudes a period charm and grace in a bouquet of musical and pianistic imagination. It makes a striking pendant to Clara's Op 7. **Patrick Rucker**

Shostakovich

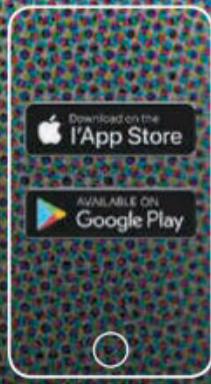
Symphony No 5. Four Romances on Poems by Pushkin, Op 46^a

James Platt bass Hallé Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder
Hallé (CD) CDHLL7550 (63' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, January 18, 2018



Manchester can be an unaccommodating place in winter and the city's own grey, off-Pennine damp hangs over this live January 2018 account of Shostakovich's Fifth, characterised by the dulling desolation of life lived under the dark clouds of duress. That is this

If Chopin's nocturnes are your evening ritual.



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GRAMOPHONE Focus

A PAIR OF FINNS

Andrew Mellor reflects on the distinctive sound worlds of Salonen and Saariaho in the company of two fine cellists

Saariaho · Salonen

Saariaho Dreaming Chaconne. Petals. Sept Papillons. Spins and Spells **Salonen** knock, breathe, shine. Sarabande per un coyote.

YTA III **Colombi** Chacona

Wilhelmina Smith vc

Ondine  ODE1294-2 (59' · DDD)

Salonen

Cello Concerto

Yo-Yo Ma vc **Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Esa-Pekka Salonen**

Sony Classical  19075 92848-2 (35' · DDD)



Wilhelmina Smith's recording underlines one of the fundamental differences between these two composers born in Finland just six years apart. Salonen's music has long prioritised clarity even when it's not the stated aim (and, in one of these works, it is). Saariaho tends to drill down into an idea to the point of shattering it (not always intentionally). To some degree both write 'traditional' Finnish nature music but where Salonen is more interested in biological and mathematical process (patterns or loops that spiral towards natural end-points and show their workings), Saariaho is fixated on the Nordic spectralist idea of tone colour dictating form.

That principle is at work in the Saariaho played here. Typically, she is interested in corners of the cello's voice: harmonics, distortion and how those things, particularly in *Petals* (1988), lead naturally to rebirth. The problem, as so often with instrumental music from this composer, is a tendency to obsess over the same devices: bow strokes that move from gentle to abrasive; tremolando that shiver away before exploding.

The multi-movement structure of *Sept Papillons* (2000) distracts Saariaho enough to mean those recurring devices don't grate as they do in *Spins and Spells* (1997), where the momentary ascents tire and we only occasionally sense the

arcane beauty of the new tuning system she applies. There are some gorgeous moments in *Papillons* and particularly in Saariaho's reinvention of the Giuseppe Colombi Chaconne, *Dreaming Chaconne*, where the harmonic relations are sufficiently un-distorted and the focus is clear. The question is whether you feel the composer's insistence on sounds other than resonant bow strokes is willingly contrary or satisfactorily consistent. I for one struggle with it.

Given their design, repetitions in Salonen's work feel all the more developmental and cumulative. The composer's own take on the Colombi Chaconne (31 composers in all wrote a response to the work for the cellist Anssi Karttunen) locks in to his way with patterning and textiles, even if he takes it to rough and tough places in *Sarabande per un coyote* (2010). Salonen wrote *YTA III* (1986) with the express desire to yank the listener in with one level of action (there's also a handy narrative: an organism in its dying moments). None of the above stops the piece being complex but the surface message hides it (one mark of a worthy piece).

Again, that's connected to Salonen's compositional style but also to his many hours unravelling scores by Ligeti and Lutosławski and presenting them in front of audiences. Patterning, diatonic motifs and room-stilling lyricism populate *knock, breathe, shine* (2010) but there is flair as well. Where Salonen uses harmonics in 'breathe', it's as an evocation of something from before glimpsed again. Smith plays everything here with captivating expression; her sound has both bold lustre and gossamer delicacy.

Salonen created something big from small means in that piece, a truly Nordic conceit. But he sensed it could be something bigger, and elements of both 'breathe' and 'shine' made it into the composer's Cello Concerto (2017) for Yo-Yo Ma. A few features distinguish this work: its constant mobility and



Wilhelmina Smith embraces contrasting Nordic traits

directional movement, fuelled by a variety of rhythmic stimuli; its singular spaciousness resulting from delectable, deep orchestration; and the sense that a force of nature lies behind its combination of runic shamanism and scientific logic.

'I like the concept of a simple thought emerging from a complex landscape', writes Salonen in the booklet. Where the simple thought of the soloist's first utterance in Sibelius's Concerto arrives as if into a forest clearing, in Salonen's it emerges into a huge cosmic space before shooting off, with cyclic imitation trailing like a comet's tail behind (notably from the *cor anglais*). The movement gets quieter as it gets more intense.

The second movement opens with another big bang while the exquisite harmonic clusters at the other end are surely descended from Rautavaara. The rhythmic impetus already mentioned feeds the third movement, pumping its increasingly erratic breathing and eventually driving it into some planet or other before the cadenza. Ma sweeps through the work as if in a single breath, no less bold than Smith and with a charisma that carries the music and the listener along. Not easy, given Salonen's determination to push soloists out on to a high wire. But it says something about composer and performer(s) that technical derring-do is not what you come away with. 

performance's power and its distinction. Tempos err towards the slow. There is no gearing-up when the piano enters in the first movement – no new sense of urgency or terror – just the feeling of a trudge deepening. Elder's grey-white *Largo* would serve as a good try-before-you-buy: it is cool, its tension tightly wound, but those qualities make the case for the idea that what the music eventually becomes is given more emphasis by how it is set in relief.

Where it works least well is in a clean *Andantino* that perhaps doesn't capture what it might have, with neither the vulgarity of a performance like Urbański's (Alpha, A/18) nor the burlesque irony mined by Svetlanov, Noseda, Petrenko, Gergiev et al. But we're back by the finale, dragged into Elder's heavy, closely recorded march in which he gives himself plenty of room to execute the full acceleration mathematically plotted in the score. Fine, disciplined playing is a prerequisite. High octane it is not. Chilling it must have been in the Bridgewater Hall, particularly in the downtrodden final pages – the applause feels like a release – but you need a certain focus to get into the same space when listening at home.

It's a neat idea to include the *Four Romances* as they were finished at the start of 1937, just before Shostakovich started work on the symphony. They are full of the elegance Mark Elder brings to any accompanying music in this performance and Gerard McBurney's orchestration of the fourth is remarkable. I can imagine a more oily and chilling vocal delivery than that from James Platt, but he has the notes, the basic sentiments and a generous tone. **Andrew Mellor**

Smetana

'Swedish Symphonic Poems'
Festive Symphony, Op 6 – Scherzo.
Hakon Jarl, Op 16. Richard III, Op 11.
Wallenstein's Camp, Op 14

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra / Leoš Svárovský
Naxos (M) 8 573597 (59' • DDD)



Time was, about three decades back, that you knew what you were getting with a Naxos disc. You wouldn't necessarily know the orchestra or the conductor but you'd get a serviceable account in workmanlike sound, and for £4.50 you'd feel it was a bargain. Decent,

quaffable *vin ordinaire* music-making; perhaps, if you were lucky, something a bit classier. But generally OK pending something better.

This new release gave me flashbacks; so much so that I had to double-check that Naxos hadn't actually recorded this repertoire before. The three symphonic poems here are 'Swedish' in that they were written between 1858 and 1861, while Smetana was resident in Gothenburg. Those were early days for symphonic poems, and Smetana follows Liszt's model: vividly scored miniature symphonies in several linked sections.

Svárovský and the Slovak Philharmonic go at them with vim and a certain swagger; there are enjoyably characterful violin and woodwind solos. But Smetana's orchestration tends towards the maximal, and both the recorded balance and Svárovský's interpretation emphasise that; muddy and murmured when quiet, congested and relentless when loud. I found myself wincing as the Slovak Philharmonic trombones bedded in for another sustained blast; subtler elements of the texture (such as the harp) tend to vanish into a hazy middle distance.

The Scherzo from the *Festive Symphony* is very beefy indeed, and at less than 59 minutes this is a short disc. I notice that it was recorded in 2014 and do wonder why Naxos waited five years to release it. It's still worth a try if you want an entry-level listen; but Noseda and the BBC Philharmonic on Chandos offer far greater rewards.

Richard Bratby

Symphonic Poems – selected comparison:
BBC PO, Noseda (11/07) (CHAN) CHAN10413

T Wilson

Symphonies – No 3; No 4, 'Passeleth Tapestry'.

Carillon

Royal Scottish National Orchestra /

Rory Macdonald

Linn (F) CKD616 (73' • DDD)



Musical nationalism is once more a hot potato in Europe and particularly in Scotland, where certain corners of the SNP have been complaining that not enough new music wears its nationality on its sleeve and that no such tradition has existed among Scottish orchestral composers (an assertion immediately challenged by James MacMillan, among others).

Thomas Wilson (1927–2001) was once described as 'the father of Scottish music', another challengeable assertion despite his talent. There must be more to imagining a country as loud, contrary, historically downtrodden and fiercely forward-looking as Scotland than Wilson's Symphony No 4, *Passeleth Tapestry*, which takes a misty-eyed view of the historic town of Paisley. The piece is stark and folkloric, uses a conservative language for the time (1988) and feels compartmentalised – happening upon workable patterns and then moving on. There are interesting effects and there is beguiling orchestration, but both operate on the surface; the moaning downward string glissandos sound kitsch rather than harmonically daring or structurally integral and tension can slacken in the oscillating stillness.

Wilson's Symphony No 3 is an absorbing and rigorous work in comparison and is arrestingly played by Macdonald's RSNO here despite some scrappy low strings. More austere, concise and tense, it musters its minimal material as if from a black hole and then sustains it over a considerable arching span (in a single movement, like its successor). Gestures are refined enough to mean repetition doesn't feel like playing for time. Big moments, as around 19 minutes in, are better prepared for musically and therefore sound less gauche than their equivalents in the later work. The Fourth's ending seems like a slight over-simplification of the remarkable ending to the Third.

Wilson's *Carillon* is a celebration of Glasgow – a hard-edged, outspoken, diverse and culturally rich city if ever there was one. Wilson loved the place. Whether or not he consciously tempered the celebratory score so as not to offend the gold chains present at the opening of the Royal Concert Hall in 1990 I can't say. But here we're back to folkloric modality and rhetorical gestures that feel wrong for the time. When it comes without the context of unjust oppression, nationalism in music is a dubious pursuit. Reflecting particular socio-geographies, less so. But the latter usually makes for better music when it's structural rather than gestural. I'd put Wilson's Symphony No 3 down as a win for Scotland. The nationalists are welcome to the rest.

Andrew Mellor

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Elgar's 'Enigma' Variations

Vasily Petrenko talks to Peter Quantrill about his approach to Elgar's personal musical portraits

As a half-hour gallery of musical portraits, the *Enigma* Variations of Elgar more nearly resembles *Pictures at an Exhibition* than the *Haydn* Variations that they're often compared with. Who better, then, to take us on a guided tour than Vasily Petrenko? Continuing his sequence of Elgar recordings with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, the St Petersburg-born conductor follows in the footsteps of Russian Elgarians such as Rozhdestvensky and Svetlanov, well placed to set the English composer in a wider European perspective and at a healthy remove from native exceptionalism.

Petrenko doesn't lose sleep over the secret of the Enigma itself. Sitting down with the score in a London hotel bar, we look at the vacillation of the theme between G major and minor: something of a signature which Elgar surely developed from piano-doodling over the Woodland Interlude from the recently completed (and still underrated) oratorio *Caractacus*.

According to Petrenko, this tonal fluctuation 'reflects the end of the Edwardian epoch, of Britain being the greatest empire on earth. He observed this and felt it, like a sunset. There is grandeur and deep autumn. And this is reflected in the work's tonal plan. There is pride and glory as well as an acknowledgement of time passing and of society changing around him. There are pictures of noble and also more humbly born people, some musicians, some not. Even a dog is there. So this starting melody has many facets.'

In their articulation of the theme, the strings of the RLPO apply dabs of portamento that you won't find in postwar recordings of the piece by, say, Boult or Barbirolli. Only in the past decade or two has it been recovered as a *fin de siècle* sound, as Elgar's own recordings testify. 'The first six bars are very difficult', notes Petrenko, 'because of the variety of ideas from each player. How much vibrato, how long is each crotchet? Do we warm the string before we start to play the note? Do we play it *senza vibrato*?' Downward portamento is harder than upwards, he explains, 'and it's quite easy not to do it at all. But then the music sounds empty.'

As a student of recordings, and a conductor who uses them as part of his preparation for any new score, Petrenko is familiar with Elgar's own practice, which he isn't seeking to recreate. 'Times change. And recordings belong to the spirit of the age in which they were made. I want the portamento to be a hint of things to come at the beginning. I don't want it to be in your face.'

There are three main protagonists in the *Enigma* Variations: Elgar, his wife Alice, and his publisher Jaeger. But Petrenko identifies three further personalities on a second tier of significance: 'There is "the lady on the boat" who is pictured in the "Romanza" [probably Lady Mary Lygon]. There is Dora Penny – "Dorabella" – an enthusiast, a supporter, a muse, maybe something more, we can't say. Another one is the cellist Nevinson, who can be heard in various places.' I remind Petrenko that Dora subsequently remarked how flattered but embarrassed she was to find herself caught so intimately, and vividly. The conductor laughs: 'I think if



Dedicated: Petrenko has worked hard with his RLPO to cultivate an 'Elgarian style'

I were a friend of Elgar's, and he had put me into the Variations, I would also be quite embarrassed!'

Alice comes first, and her theme also fluctuates between major and minor. Then a portrait of Hew David Steuart-Powell, with whom Elgar (on the violin) and Nevinson had played piano trios. This is accordingly pianistic: very tricky for the strings, according to Petrenko, because of the awkward intervals. Later on, Elgar caricatures a less accomplished pianist, in 'Troyte': 'I think he was just annoyed that he had to teach the piano to someone with little talent. And someone with little talent and great enthusiasm is always a dangerous combination!'

However, as Petrenko is keen to emphasise, Elgar is as affectionate as he is penetrating in his character studies. 'There isn't a single enemy in the Variations. You can sense the love he felt for all of them – some more, some less. Likewise there is no dark side, and that's most unusual.'

Where some conductors have attempted to find a dark side is in the *Adagio* subtitled 'Nimrod' and dedicated to Jaeger. But, to paraphrase Rattle discussing Mahler's *Adagietto*, no one died. For Elgar himself, the piece brought Jaeger to his mind's eye as a 'solemn, wholesome, hearty old dear'. 'It's a very nice, gentle walk,' says Petrenko of 'Nimrod'. 'The trick is to connect the statements of the theme and the entries.'

I encourage orchestras to avoid the habit at figure 34 of waiting forever, when the strings are playing, before the winds come in. The same thing can happen again at figure 36. We want a progression without forcing the downbeat. This is a matter of the orchestra knowing where we want the downbeat. Not I, or a single string or percussionist, but we.'

The other, most solemn variation is the 'Romanza', where the second theme of Schumann's Piano Concerto is quoted three times – literally marked with quotation marks in the clarinet part. Petrenko has his own theory about this: 'Perhaps it refers to the way that Schumann ended his life in madness. Perhaps Elgar felt that his passion for this lady was driving him mad at the time. We don't know for sure, but we know that his marriage to Alice was rocky at moments.'

Or is the quotation from Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*? Either way, the clarinet solo is accompanied by a timpani roll, probably evoking the engine noise of a ship carrying Elgar's distant beloved (but which one?). In the score it's marked to be played with side-drum sticks, but Petrenko follows the first conductor of the Variations, Hans Richter, in having the timpanist use a 50-pence piece. 'But coins with edges like that can't be found in every country! Sometimes timpanists play with several coins on top of the skin and use hard sticks. But the coins do make a difference. You hit a stick on the timpani and it bounces, but a coin doesn't. The contact is much neater and more metallic, of course. In English orchestras, timpanists all know about this moment, but abroad I have to explain it.'

'The finale reminds me of Symphonia domestica. Elgar is sitting in the room, and the characters enter one by one'

Dorabella's stammer is another element that requires explanation to non-British orchestras – the need to play the first note of her motif a little longer, 'tenuto', as Petrenko remarks, 'and then to catch up with the beat on the second and third notes. Perhaps it shows her thrill with delight at the presence of Elgar!'

'EDU' is the title of the concluding variation, initialising Alice's pet name for her husband to conceal a self-portrait. 'The finale is clearly written last,' Petrenko remarks. It reminds him of Strauss's *Symphonia domestica*: 'It's like Elgar is sitting in the room, and the characters enter one by one.' Finally the brass are given their head after pages and pages of bare staves. 'It's much more dense, like the sum of all the previous variations. Everywhere in the finale there are inversions of previous ideas. The *animato* at figure 63 comes from Sinclair's dog [Variation XI, 'GRS']. And the *Grandioso* climax [figure 68] is taken from Brahms's writing, with all those two-against-three hemiolas. Then there's a chromatic inversion of the idea in the coda of the fourth variation, "WMB".'

The writing in 'EDU' is tough for every player, Elgar at his most Straussian, anticipating the long-form arguments of the symphonies. 'But all the awkward elements are there for a purpose,' concludes Petrenko. 'Elgarian style is quite different to playing Britten or Beethoven. And that requires constant work for a number of years from the principal conductor. Once the majority of players accept these ideas, then it goes into the culture of the orchestra.'

► To read Gramophone's review of Petrenko's Enigma Variations, turn to page 39



Formidable intensity
and interpretive intelligence.

BBC Music Magazine, United Kingdom

Among the ever-present memories of Callas, Gencer, Sutherland, Sills, Caballé or Devia, the Latvian soprano finds a place that is anything but modest.



Opéra Magazine, France

Formidable voice and plenty of artistry. Marina Rebeka launches her own label with a selection of bel canto scenes. As before, she scores big points for the nobility and grandezza of her performances.

Gramophone, United Kingdom

With her voluptuous but scalable voice and instinctive sense of musical drama, Rebeka gives a lot of herself in these characterizations, inhabiting each heroine so fully that the music seems her natural communicative idiom.

Opera News, USA — Critic's Choice CD

Soprano Marina Rebeka is one of the great masters in her field.

Opernglas, Germany

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Chamber



Richard Wigmore on the Maxwell Quartet's take on Haydn's Op 71:

'The opening of No 3 darts and leaps with a conspiratorial twinkle – a thoroughly delightful performance' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 57**



David Fanning welcomes the Artemis Quartet's Shostakovich:

'The first movement of the Fifth Quartet is sustained at the maximum level of intensity, just as it should be' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**

Alwyn · Carwithen

Alwyn String Quartet No 3. Three Winter Poems

Carwithen String Quartets – No 1; No 2

Tippett Quartet

Somm Céleste (SOMMCD0194 (73' • DDD)



The string quartet as a genre always held a special fascination for William Alwyn and

while a young composer he produced no fewer than 13 works for what he later referred to as 'the most perfect of mediums'. Taught at the Royal Academy by John Blackwood McEwen, himself the author of 17 quartets between 1893 and 1947, he developed an affinity and fluency for this most abstract of instrumental idioms. Attempting to dispel the stereotype of a 'film composer', a profession at which he proved immensely competent, creative and prolific in the 1930s and '40s, he set himself a challenging agenda after the Second World War with the composition of a more ambitious output of symphonies (notably Nos 1-4 between 1949 and 1959), works that illustrate his impressive powers of intellectual organisation and structural fecundity as well as his talent for colourful, post-Straussian orchestration. At the same time he also embarked on a more challenging odyssey of chamber composition of which the *Three Winter Poems* trilogy of 1948 provides an unusual example of his flair for pictorialism (which he had learnt through his composition for the big screen) combined with the sparser textures of the quartet.

The two quartets of Doreen Carwithen, one-time pupil of Alwyn at the Royal Academy and later his second wife, date from early in her career. No 1 in three movements is in fact a student work of 1945, somewhat neoclassical in its austere, modal harmonies and studied polyphony. An increased warmth lifts the attractive slow movement before a sprightly contrapuntal finale returns to the neoclassical world of the first movement.

No 2, dating from 1950, experiments with a cyclic two-movement paradigm (anticipating that of Alwyn's Symphony No 2 of 1953) whose expressive *molto adagio* functions as an extended anticipation of the second movement, an invigorating *Allegro* with a distinctive, slower and more lyrical developmental phase.

Alwyn's String Quartet No 3 of 1984, written the year before his death and inspired by a poem of Joy Finzi, was the last of his chamber works. Also in two movements, it reverses the paradigm of Carwithen's Quartet No 2 by placing the *Allegro* first and situating the emotional emphasis on the substantial slow movement which follows. The first movement, which combines elements of scherzo, is a big-boned sonata. Alwyn's generous romanticism surfaces in the spacious second subject, which is later recapitulated with even greater munificence. The slow movement, which unusually combines elegy and waltz, has all of Alwyn's passionate hallmarks. The Tippett Quartet should be congratulated for their sympathetic interpretations of a neglected repertoire, though one that should be more often performed. **Jeremy Dibble**

JS Bach

'The Trio Sonata Project'

Trio Sonatas – BWV527; BWV1028; BWV1029; BWV1039 (1027). Partita, BWV997

Tripla Concordia

Arcana (A114 (63' • DDD)



'The Trio Sonata Project' takes inspiration from the Baroque practice of arranging pre-existing music by other composers for a different set of instruments. As recorder player Walter van Hauwe emphasises, this is something that Bach did himself – borrowing from Vivaldi, Pergolesi and others – giving each his own touch without affecting the 'message' of the original works. But to touch Bach; when

does admiration bleed into hubris? When do magpies morph into vultures? Charming booklet notes try to set this to rights: in an imaginary conversation, presumably over Zimmermann's famous brew of coffee, Bach gives keyboardist Sergio Ciomei his blessing. This quasi-blind date ('will he really come?'), while hovering on the absurd ('Don't ever stop, Sergio. You should produce, transcribe, play, record, teach and spread the news'), sets up an interesting transhistorical context for the project.

The album is a mixed bag. Tripla Concordia's version of BWV1039 – a historical arrangement by Bach himself – is particularly successful. Quietly menacing in the *Andante*, the two voice flutes open out to incisive playing that sways with imagination in the *Presto*. The arrangement of BWV997 for alto recorder and harpsichord is less convincing. Ciomei's harpsichord-playing in the Prelude lacks lushness. The Sarabande also is, unfortunately, heavy-handed. However, van Hauwe's elegant phrasing does the job for a teasingly short moment: the sunlight of the relative major appears in smiling inevitability – almost distracting from the strange abruptness in the continuo-playing. In tempo, the Gigue and Double lie on the safe side of exciting. Yet superb dynamic control in van Hauwe's recorder makes for unpredictable intensity.

So, to borrow Ciomei's analogy, would this album get a second date? Yes. It had its hiccups: a slightly gruff table manner dotted with some dull moments. Next time, I would expect what were flashes of imagination to pervade the conversation, and something that extra bit special to seal a kiss. **Mark Seow**

Bartók · Beethoven · Debussy

'Innovators'

Bartók String Quartet No 2, Sz67

Beethoven String Quartet No 11, 'Serioso', Op 95

Debussy String Quartet, Op 10

Benyounes Quartet

Champs Hill (CHRCD147 (71' • DDD)



More enchanting than shocking: the Nordic Quartet embark on a complete survey of the string quartets of Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen - see review on page 57



This disc is a sort of 10th-anniversary gift from the Benyounes Quartet

to themselves: a programme of three works with which, apparently, they 'feel a particularly strong connection'. Ten years does that make them a novice group or a well-established one? There's certainly not the smallest trace of overfamiliarity or routine about these three interpretations. The whole disc is charged with an energy and a sense of excited discovery that I found immensely engaging.

And if you begin in the middle, with the Beethoven, you'll hear it right away – the breathless verve and the terrific bite (listen to the black-toothed rasp of Kim Vaughan's cello) with which they launch into this super-concentrated masterpiece. From the explosive opening to the needlepoint hilarity of that astonishing, scurrying F major final coda, the Benyounes never let up: dynamic contrasts are bold and characterisation is larger than life. That spirit seems to filter out across the whole disc into the Bartók and

Debussy quartets that surround it. Even in the tenderest moments (and they handle Debussy's slow movement with exquisite control) there's no loss in tension. Everything here feels alert and vibrantly alive.

And yet there's nothing raw or undercooked in these interpretations. From the rapturous way Zara Benyounes's violin crests the first climax of the Bartók to the almost improvisatory ebb and flow of the first movement of the Beethoven, these are readings which – however fresh – are born of deep familiarity with the score and a corresponding trust between the four players. A couple of tiny smudges to passagework or intonation are a small price to pay for such life-affirming playing: if this was a live performance I suspect I'd be raving about it for days afterwards. **Richard Bratby**

Beethoven

'The Complete String Quartets, Vol 2'

String Quartets - No 2, Op 18 No 2; No 8, Op 59 No 2; No 9, Op 59 No 3; No 10, 'Harp', Op 74; No 15, Op 132

Casals Quartet

Harmonia Mundi ③ HMM90 2403/5 (161' • DDD)



Bored of Beethoven? Judging from the advance reaction to next year's 250th

anniversary celebrations, some people already are. Perhaps you know one of these jaded souls, in which case I can think of no better prescription than this latest release from Cuarteto Casals. These interpretations don't just strip off the varnish; they tear off the gilded frame, X-ray the canvas and light it in neon. If, after listening, you still think that Beethoven has nothing new to say, you're probably a terminal case.

If you've heard their previous release (9/18), you'll have some idea what to expect: fearless tempos, radical dynamic contrasts, rhythms that aren't so much dancelike as instinctive and a style of playing – improvisatory, light-footed and often vibrato-free – that draws deep charcoal blacks from Arnaud Tomàs Realp's cello and glinting, quicksilver brilliance from the two violins (Vera Martínez Mehner plays first in most of the works here, with

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Abel Tomàs Realp taking the top line in Op 18 No 2).

You could call this historically informed (I believe they use period bows on modern instruments); in fact, I kept reaching for modern parallels. In the outer sections of the 'Heiliger Dankgesang' slow movement of Op 132, they evoke Feldman or Pärt, creating ever-deeper pools of sonic stillness even while, over the course of the movement, they gradually intensify the expression to the point where Beethoven's anguished sincerity feels almost too piercing for the naked eye. The final moments of Op 59 No 3 and Op 74, breathlessly fast and superbly controlled, suggest Bartók or Ligeti's insect-like swarms of high-velocity counterpoint.

These players are uncompromisingly committed. You can tell a lot about a quartet's approach to the Op 18 set from the first two bars of Op 18 No 2: measured rococo ornament or improvisatory swirl? With Cuarteto Casals, it simply seems to flash away into the ether. Op 74, that most fantastically coloured of all Beethoven quartets, is like a sonic kaleidoscope here, its loose-fitting textures held tightly under control.

Still, you don't come to Cuarteto Casals for Biedermeier charm (though they sing very beguilingly in the slow movement of Op 18 No 2): you're here for Beethoven in the raw. If the cello's pizzicato in the slow movement of Op 59 No 3 can rarely have sounded quite so sinister, nor can Beethoven's merrymaking with the Russian 'Slava!' theme in Op 59 No 2 have conveyed quite such mischievous glee. Vibrato-free, the opening dissonance of that same work really sets the teeth on edge and the ensemble seems to trip almost by accident into the main *Allegro*. As I've said before, these performances won't be for everyone. They might offend some. But you'd need cloth ears and a very closed mind to find them dull. **Richard Bratby**

Bons

Nomaden

Jean-Guihen Queyras vc

Atlas Ensemble / Ed Spanjaard

BIS F BIS2073 (62' • DDD/DSD)



For decades after it was first given in 1985, the Grawemeyer

Award was mostly canonical, honouring composers who most regular visitors to the concert hall would recognise, even if they remained aloof to their music. Witold

Lutosławski won the first award, with its \$100,000 purse, for his Third Symphony, and since then the prize has gone to Ligeti, Birtwistle, Penderecki, John Adams, Boulez and Kurtág, among others. In recent years the prize has evolved, and it's refreshing to see the winners spanning a wider range of musical styles and emerging from career paths not necessarily harnessed to the traditional symphony orchestra, concert hall, opera house or academy.

Last December the Dutch composer Joel Bons was announced the winner of the 2019 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award for a piece called *Nomaden*. *Nomaden* was composed in 2015-16 for the cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras, who engages concertante-style with the Atlas Ensemble, a group founded by Bons in 2002 to bring together top musicians from a range of international musical idioms. Its string section includes violin, viola and double bass, along with the Chinese erhu, the kamancha (the spike fiddle of Iran and the Caucasus), the kemence (from Turkey) and the sarangi (a bowed lute native to North India). The array of winds, plucked strings and percussion are equally wide-ranging in national styles and musical timbres.

Nomaden, or *Nomads*, weaves the cello line through 38 short movements, the longest lasting little more than four minutes, with transitional sections, dubbed passages, that luxuriate in static explorations of the sonic potential of the various instruments. Some movements are decidedly folkloristic, though the melodies may be entirely new; others have a dreamlike mix of instruments from wildly different traditions – steel pans joining fiddles and lutes; and yet others touch upon but rarely linger on Western idioms, motivic variation and a gesture to the classical string quartet repertoire.

The final movement, 'Epilogue', begins with a slightly woozy gesture, as if everyone is recovering from killer jet lag or a late night on the town, and that might stand for the larger impact of the piece, which is oneiric, dizzying and meditative by turns. The pleasure isn't just in the range of musical textures and gestures but also largely a matter of the soloist, who manages to project a consistent and guiding presence without ever getting in the way of his fellow soloists in the ensemble. A characteristic trope of this piece – a skittering cello decrescendo that dissolves the solo line into the larger musical fabric – allows the soloist to project a respectful, genial, retiring sense of remove from the proceedings, as if he's just passing through, listening, responding, and moving on.

Given the potential for cheap appropriation and kitschy pastiche when writing a musical travelogue of this sort, that trope is a welcome one and allows the listener to enjoy this tapestry of sounds without reservation. **Philip Kennicott**

Britten • Purcell

Britten String Quartets – No 1, Op 25; No 2, Op 36; No 3, Op 94. Three Divertimenti

Purcell Fantasias in Four Parts – Z737; Z738; Z739; Z740; Z741

Doric Quartet

Chandos F (two discs for the price of one) CHAN20124 (112' • DDD)



The Doric Quartet's beautiful Britten cycle was recorded in tandem with a series of concerts, greatly admired, in Snape Maltings last October. They describe it themselves as a 'milestone' since their formation in 1998, and in some ways it can be seen as the culmination of a long association both with Britten's music and with Suffolk itself. They were formed at Pro Corda, the school for chamber musicians at Leiston, not far from Aldeburgh, and the Suffolk landscape, they tell us, has long been in their minds and imaginations when studying Britten's scores. Hélène Clément, meanwhile, the Doric's viola player, plays the composer's own instrument, previously owned by Frank Bridge, who made a present of it to Britten when he left for the US in 1939.

The set also, however, reflects upon the indelible imprint left by Purcell's music on Britten's work, which is sometimes taken as read, though the juxtaposition here is effective and telling. The Second Quartet was famously written to mark the 250th anniversary of Purcell's birth, while the great closing Passacaglia of the Third was Britten's last deployment of a form he took from his predecessor and made his own. Moreover, hearing the Purcell Fantasias, particularly Nos 8 and 9 (Z739 and 740) in D minor and A minor respectively, in proximity to the First Quartet is to be reminded of their closeness in mood to the patterns of introspection and energy that give the First both its structural integrity and its nostalgic tone, particularly in its long, finely wrought slow movement.

The performances are all superbly judged and controlled, balancing fragility with strength, restraint with great depth of feeling. The opening of the First, with its

high, ethereal phrases offset by worldly, guitar-like cello twangs, is rich with ambiguities, while the *Andante calmo*, its long violin solo played with exquisite poise by Alex Redington, grieves quietly for the war-torn England Britten left behind during his American sojourn. In the Second, the Doric offset formal logic with deep emotional resonance, sweeping us through the ceremonies and wonders of the final Chacony with great refinement and dignity before we reach the final moments of assertion and grandeur. The Third, haunted by thoughts of imminent mortality, bids farewell to life and love with quiet dignity and gazes towards infinity as time ticks away towards the close: it's wonderfully done, and you can't help but be moved by it.

The early Divertimenti, played with considerable wit and elegance, provide some much-needed contrast to the intensity of it all, while the counterpoint of Purcell's Fantasias is finely realised in performances of considerable weight and finesse. Comparisons here are perhaps invidious. I have great fondness for the Amadeus Quartet's slightly more spacious way with the Second in their 1977 performance (Testament DVD, 2/06), and if you like a more overtly dramatic approach to this repertory, then you may prefer the Belcea Quartet's fractionally more extrovert interpretations (EMI, 7/05). But this is a major cycle, engaging and profound in equal measure, and you need to hear it. **Tim Ashley**

Debussy · Fauré · Szumanowski · Chopin

Chopin Nocturne No 20, Op *posth* (arr Milstein)

Debussy Violin Sonata **Fauré** Violin Sonata No 1,

Op 13 **Szumanowski** Violin Sonata, Op 9

Bomsori Kim vn **Rafał Blechacz** pf

DG (F) 483 6467GH (63' • DDD)



It's a violin contest we have to thank for this new duo partnership between longstanding DG artist Rafał Blechacz and the Korean violinist newcomer Bomsori Kim: the Polish pianist first approached Kim about partnering up having spotted her on television competing in the 2016 Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition. Kim went on to take second prize but one suspects that, in the context of Blechacz and DG, she's ultimately scored the jackpot.

It seems that Blechacz has done well to find Kim, too, because there's an audible

meeting of musical minds across their exploration of French lyricism and Polish melancholy, heard right from the start of the opening Fauré Violin Sonata No 1. First, Blechacz's picked-out melody sings out brightly with passionate *amour* from within lucid-textured cascading figures. Then in comes Kim, counterfoiling her equal romance with a clean, supple sound. Engineering-wise, as well, there's a nicely egalitarian balance between the two of them.

As it happens, the balancing isn't always so evenly weighted. I'd like the piano to have remained further forwards in the Fauré's second movement, for instance, and indeed throughout the Debussy Sonata. What does remain constant, however, is the sheer energy and drive, aided by Kim's sound itself: direct and ardent, with mahogany-hued lower registers contrasting with sweetly ringing, singing upper ones. This all combines to especial effect with the Debussy, in an unusually driven, emotionally strong reading of this autumnal work. One of Kim's most effective gifts here is her spotlighting of Debussy's linguistic debt to the Orient; listen in the first movement to how grace-note inflections and *sur la touche* playing is so very husky and languorous that the parallels with Asian voice flute are unmissable (2'37"-2'50"). More intelligent detail comes by way of Blechacz's voicing, such as towards the end of the second movement when he draws our attention to the isolated G and A quavers hidden within, but clashing against, the piano's steadily pulsing semiquaver chords (3'32"). Perhaps their most striking joint effort comes towards the end of the third movement, where they take Debussy's *meno mosso* and *cedez* markings right to the *n*th degree. Some may find this a bit too much of a pulling-on of the brakes, but no one can deny that it's all in the score.

The Szumanowski Sonata then comes perfectly sculpted and paced from Blechacz, with Kim herself sounding every bit as much under its skin; listen to the colours and emotional shifts they bring to its *Andantino tranquillo*. Funnily, though, while Nathan Milstein's transcription of Chopin's Nocturne No 20 is theoretically the perfect palette-cleanser, Kim's romantic and highly vibrato'd reading leaves me slightly over-sated. Something more spartan and reined-in would have been just the ticket here, and possibly have hit the piece's particular brand of melancholy more squarely on the head. **Charlotte Gardner**

Fennessy

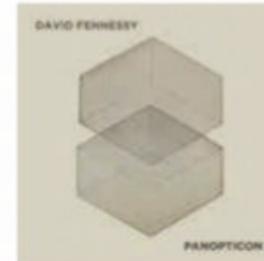
Panopticon^a. **Piano Trio**^b.

13 Factories^c. **Hirta Rounds**^d

Ensemble Modern / Johannes Kalitzke;

Hebrides Ensemble;^d **Munich Chamber Orchestra;**^{ab} **Psappha**

NMC Debut Discs (F) NMCD244 (69' • DDD)



David Fennessy, now in his 40s, has come a long way since playing guitar in rock bands.

Born in Ireland, now teaching in Scotland, his music is quite different from that of his own teacher, James MacMillan, or of the leading Irish maverick Gerald Barry. Yet it is no less insistent than Barry's on keeping mainstream traditions at a distance, no less resourceful than MacMillan's in seeking to depict places and spaces evocatively and, at times, confrontationally.

A fascination with instrumental sonority and the positive value of inflecting conventional tunings and notations, sometimes electronically, is clear in all four works included on this NMC Debut disc. What could presage an exercise in back-to-basics minimalism at the start of *Panopticon* soon proves deceptive as subtle harmonic nuances in the string sextet colour and counter the confident reiterations of the cimbalom. The title's reference to a symmetrical structure, radiating out from an all-controlling centre, does not generate an entirely mechanical musical experience: on the contrary, the work progresses absorbingly over almost 20 minutes from a rooted, resonating core to something much more mysterious and allusive. This capacity to bring a quality of understatement gradually into focus also works well in *13 Factories*, a concentrated and diverse meditation built around the recorded sounds of 'old looms traditionally used in the Outer Hebrides to produce Harris Tweed', as Kate Molleson's helpful notes explain.

What might represent Fennessy's more experimental side can be heard in the Piano Trio, subtitled 'music for the pauses in a conversation between John Cage and Morton Feldman'. A radio discussion between the two celebrated composers, complete with pauses and laughter, coexists with Fennessy's mordant musical response to ideas about oppositions and interactions between 'pure art' and 'intrusion', as overheard on the tape. If this is composition as special case – a one-off rather than a contribution to a genre – Fennessy provides a successful counterbalance in *Hirta Rounds*, a magical portrait in string-orchestral sound of a distant, deserted

island in the Outer Hebrides. The steadily circulating harmonies, looping and wheeling like birds in flight, have a distinctly spectral quality, suggesting something frozen in time yet nevertheless slowly, imperceptibly transforming itself in ways which can only be guessed at. Here, as throughout these recordings from various expert ensembles, the sound balances are suitably alert to the intricate shifts of perspective that Fennessy builds into his refreshingly unpretentious scores. **Arnold Whittall**

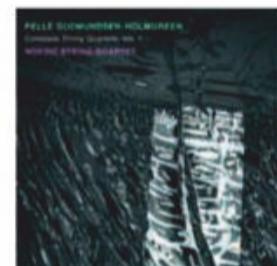
Gudmundsen-Holmgreen

'Complete String Quartets, Vol 1'

String Quartets - No 1; No 2, 'Quartetto facile'; No 3, 'Five Small Studies'; No 4; No 5, 'Step by Step'; No 6, 'Parting'

Nordic Quartet

Dacapo  8 226217 (63' • DDD)



Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen wrote his first three string quartets in 1959 and his 14th and last in 2013, three years before he died. This first volume in a new cycle comes from an ensemble coached by Tim Frederiksen (he who gave us the Nightingale Quartet) at the Royal Danish

Academy of Music. The Nordic Quartet gave their graduation performance at the Academy last autumn.

It's revealing to see how this ultra-distinctive composer's voice was formed over the course of the first six quartets, all presented here (though not in order). PGH took in Fartein Valen-style serialism in No 1, a calmly piloted *Andante* of eight minutes. No 2 is focused but conventional, with some signs of the future in its trickery and itchy-scratchy *Allegretto*. No 3 is a series of short studies, not unlike Webern's Bagatelles, which can sound complex but are grounded by simple rhythms. By No 4 of 1967, PGH is approaching that laconic simplicity and childlike mixture of wonder and naivety that would colour so many of his masterpieces. It's like a stretch of gauze that reimagines the chirping of cicadas.

Nos 5 and 6 are recognisably PGH in an instant – music apparently carried by an animal instinct that the composer is barely able to tame, and that's always more enchanting than shocking despite how it looks on the page. No 5, *Step by Step*, uses a mapped tonal scheme hinted at in No 2: a system of broadening intervals which suggests determined movement across a chessboard and eventually prompts momentary collapses through exhaustion. The shuffling gait so distinctive of the

composer is emerging here, while the note-writer Steen Pade draws comparison with the servant Clov from Beckett's *Endgame*.

No 6, *Parting*, is classic PGH in its exploration of relationships straining in their formation or disintegration (the latter in this case). It is beautiful even when the breakdown feels inevitable – huge silences punctuated by gestures of such considered beauty that the tension never lets up, suggesting the deep unspoken things that bind us together. It is desperately sad even as it smiles. These are tight, no-nonsense and considered performances. The Nordic Quartet don't quite project the individuality of the Nightingale Quartet and can sound laid-back. Perhaps, in these works, that's both a benefit and an accomplishment. I relish the works to come and hope we'll be hearing PGH's '15th' quartet work, *All In One*, which consists of Quartets Nos 12, 13 and 14 played at the same time. **Andrew Mellor**

Haydn

Haydn Three String Quartets, Op 71 **Fraser**

The Beauty of the North **Gow** Miss Dumbreck

MacGregor Griogal Cridhe (Gregor's Lament)

Skinner The Hurricane. The Rosebud of

Allenvale **G Smith** Guardswell and Truly

Maxwell Quartet

Linn  CKD602 (74' • DDD)

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20:00

Historical symphonies | The inspiration of
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Anima rewards the well-known Schubert with *Diapason d'Or de l'Année* and the largely forgotten, but very talented Ludwig Spohr and his remarkable *Historische Symphonie*.

Fri 29.11.19
20:00

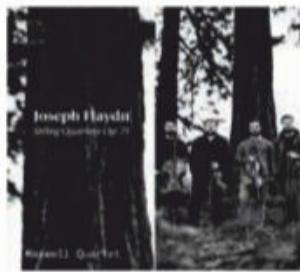
Russian triptych | Piano: Anna Vinnitskaya

Rimsky-Korsakov is flanked by Rachmaninov and Prokofiev in a breathtaking anthology, that promises to deliver on fireworks and intense coloring.

Sat 18.04.20
20:00

Beethoven: vigorously vocal | Choir: Kammerchor Dresden

The whole world knows that Bruges is the place to be when it comes to Beethoven-performances on period instruments. Anima offers a taste of the 7th symphony as well as two monumental vocal-instrumental oeuvres.



Composed for London's Hanover Square Rooms, Haydn's Op 71

Quartets balance a chamber-musical refinement with broad effects calculated to appeal to a large public. Each begins with a loud call to attention – a cue for audience chatter to cease. No 2 in D, uniquely in Haydn's quartets, continues with a miniature slow introduction. After their opening gestures, the first movements then combine extrovert energy with taut thematic argument that reflects the proximity of the 'London' Symphonies.

Earthy robustness will take you a long way in these quartets; and with their clean, direct style, the all-male, all-Scottish Maxwell Quartet vividly realise the fast movements' flamboyant contrasts of texture, register and dynamics. In movements like the bounding opening *Allegro* of No 2 they relish the bouts of virtuosity Haydn gives all four instruments, his nearest approach to the showy *quatuor concertant* that was all the rage in France. Here and elsewhere, their precision at speed and unanimity of bowing are a match for allcomers. The opening *Vivace* of No 3, Haydn at his most antic, darts and leaps with a conspiratorial twinkle – a thoroughly delightful performance.

The Maxwells' roots in their native folk music show both in the finales and in the lustily paced and accented minuets. In their engaging booklet note the players pinpoint the 'fantastic waltz-like section' in the Trio of No 3's Minuet, 'best heard with a pint of beer in one's hand'. The performance proves their point. They also throw intriguing light on Haydn's demotic spirit by following each of the quartets with their own arrangements of traditional Scottish tunes, by turns soulful and rowdy.

As you might by now expect, the Maxwells keep the slow movements well moving. Vibrato is carefully rationed, Romantic sentiment minimised. In the *Adagio* of No 1 they emphasise the dotted siciliano rhythms, while the *Andante* of No 3, perkily *con moto*, sets out as a brisk country walk. Yet, while never less than enjoyable, the Maxwells' clear-eyed approach has its limitations. The two rival ensembles listed below give the music more space and flexibility, and seem to feel Haydn's remote key shifts more acutely. The Lindsays, especially, savour the sensuous richness of texture and harmony in the *Adagio* of No 2 (the Maxwells are too inclined to stress the bar line) and the

exquisite closing stages of No 1's *Adagio*, where the whole quartet transforms itself into a harp. Simply put, both rival quartets moved me more deeply than the Maxwells. Still, I'm glad to have heard this new recording from a young ensemble whose fresh, unaffected playing marries technical brilliance with an authentically Haydn-esque *joie de vivre*. **Richard Wigmore**

Haydn – selected comparisons:

Lindsay Qt (8/05) (ASV) GLD4012

Takács Qt (12/11) (HYPE) CDA67781

Schubert

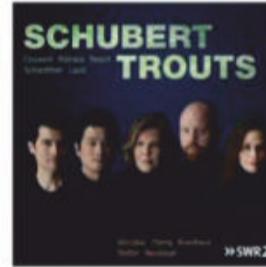
'Trouts'

Cruixent Cybervariation: After Schubert's 'Trout Quintet' **Lazić** The Trout Pond, Op 23 **Räihälä** Kirkasventinen (Brightwater) **Resch** Pond and Spring **Schachtner** Addendum to Franz Schubert's 'Trout Quintet' **Schubert** 'Trout' Quintet, D667

Lena Neudauer vn **Wen Xiao Zheng** va **Janulo**

Ishizaka vc **Rick Stotijn** db **Silke Avenhaus** pf

AVI-Music (F) AV18553408 (58' • DDD)



An international ensemble perform Schubert's evergreen quintet for piano and strings, and surround it with the 'Trout Project' – a sequence of responses to the work by an even more strikingly international selection of composers, all commissioned by the recording's pianist, Silke Avenhaus. It's a buoyant *Trout*, with Avenhaus's glistening pianism conspiring with the ever-responsive double bass of Rick Stotijn to dart effortlessly between the work's quicksilver changes of mood. It's not, perhaps, the tidiest of performances, with the occasional fluffed run or missed note, but it's near-impossible to do damage to this indelible work and occasional moments such as these needn't register.

It's also a fiendish work to balance for microphones, and here the piano's resonance is accentuated to a greater extent than that of the strings. This isn't a problem in itself but can in places lead to the ring of the piano's high writing in octaves dominating at the expense of the lower compass of the other instruments. On the other hand, the rhythmic motor that powers the *Andante* is made all the more audible as it passes between instruments and each player's moment in the sun in the fourth-movement variations is ably characterised. When charismatic players such as these gather to perform such a charismatic work as this, the results are always highly satisfactory.

The companion pieces take thematic material from 'Die Forelle', the song that provides the theme for Schubert's variations (and the quintet's nickname). The challenge for each composer is to create individual music in a modern language from material that is ineradicably tonal, based on triads and scalic figures. Ferran Cruixent slows down the theme and fogs it with clouds and clusters; Gerald Resch and Johannes X Schachtner break it into fragments; Dejan Lazić introduces a faintly jazzy feel and Osmo Tapi Räihälä deploys glissandos and extended string techniques. But even without knowing the context in which they were created, you'd guess straightaway the source material for these five modern miniatures. **David Threasher**

Schumann

Piano Trios – No 1, Op 63; No 2, Op 80;

No 3, Op 110. Phantasiestücke, Op 88

Horszowski Trio

Avie (M) (2) AV2405 (103' • DDD)



Leif Ove Andsnes and Christian and Tanja Tetzlaff's full-throated, richly romantic accounts of the Schumann piano trios came as something of a revelation (EMI, 7/11). The Horszowski Trio on this new Avie set sound almost reticent by comparison. It's not that these young musicians are lacking passion or fire – quite the contrary, in fact – but rather that their approach is more inward-looking. Or, to put it another way, Andsnes et al play as if to an audience in a concert hall, whereas the Horszowski sound like they're playing for one another at home. Right from the start of the First Trio, for example, note how they respect Schumann's *piano* marking, so the opening paragraph seems to be simmering with disquiet. I love, too, how they send the rapidly ascending fusillades of triplets flying like sparks in the wind (starting at 0'35").

Although the Horszowski are mostly attentive to textual detail, there are one or two passages where they miss something important. Where, say, are the hairpin crescendo-decrescendos in the Trio of Op 63's scherzo-like second movement? Schumann's markings indicate these phrases should undulate in waves; here they flow in a placid stream. But, thankfully, the musicians do make the most of the crucial hairpins in the first movement of Op 110, suggesting a veritable ocean of emotional surges and swells.

It's in the Horszowski's attention to textural detail, however, that I think they outshine even Andsnes and the Tetzlaffs. Listen, say, to how they balance heartiness and buoyancy at the start of Op 80. Schumann marks this movement *Sehr lebhaft*, yet they don't push the tempo too hard and focus instead on articulation. The result has an intoxicating frothiness. Then, when Schumann gradually sprinkles in smooth, lyrical lines and starts stirring those disparate elements more closely together – the sparkling and the silky – the Horszowski's consistent differentiation helps enormously in generating and sustaining tension. This lightness of touch is evident in every one of the finales, as well as in the delightful 'Humoreske' from the Op 88 *Phantasiestücke*.

Balance plays an important role in texture too, of course, and it happens that violinist Jesse Mills and cellist Raman Ramakrishnan are tonally very well matched indeed. Just listen to how blended their singing is in the *Phantasiestücke*'s lovely 'Duetto'. Producer and engineer Judith Sherman also deserves kudos for finding near-ideal parity among the three players within the warm, natural acoustic of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York. Andsnes and the Tetzlaffs are still my prime recommendation – not forgetting Gilels, Kogan and Rostropovich in Op 63 (DG) – but be sure I've made room on my shelf for the Horszowski Trio, too. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

C & T Tetzlaff, Andsnes (7/11) (EMI/WARN) 094180-2

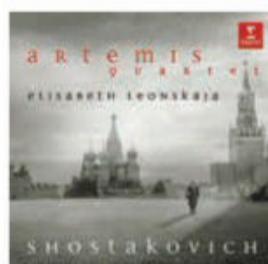
Shostakovich

String Quartets - No 5, Op 92; No 7, Op 108.

Piano Quintet, Op 57^a

^aElisabeth Leonskaja pf Artemis Quartet

Erato ⑤ 9029 55407-6 (76' • DDD)



Shostakovich's Fifth Quartet is one of his most demanding, certainly in terms of physical, emotional and intellectual stamina, and while the Seventh may be only half its length, it only gives up its secrets to those fully at home with the idiom.

In all these respects the Artemis Quartet have much to offer. From the opening bars of No 5 it's plain that they're not going to pull any punches, never shortening or lightening notes unless explicitly so instructed by the score. Their entire first movement is sustained at the maximum level of intensity, just as it should be, and the fearsome challenges to intonation in

the central *Andante* are fully met. For myself, I crave a more intimate confessional tone in the middle of this movement, and less bustling energy at the beginning of the finale, in order to give sharper profile to the large-scale emotional drama. But these are perhaps personal choices. Both here and in No 7 the Artemis impressively establish their credentials in what I imagine will just be the first of a series of Shostakovich recordings.

In the Piano Quintet I have more serious doubts: not over their playing but over Elisabeth Leonskaja's. She is well known as a plain-speaking pianist, not over-concerned with nuances of colour or timing. This can pay dividends in terms of long structural lines and determined character. The Scherzo here is especially effective at a slower-than-usual tempo, and the fourth movement is darkly expressive. It's certainly good, too, not to be emotionally effusive in the neo-Bachian Prelude. But Leonskaja opens the work so laboriously, so doggedly, so literally in her avoidance of pedal, that I would simply not have continued listening had I not been reviewing. Soldiering on, the piano sound in the second movement is bulky and the phrasing dogged and unimaginative. Not an account I shall be returning to, I fear. Recording quality is fine in the quartets but unappetisingly dry in the Quintet.

David Fanning

G Williams

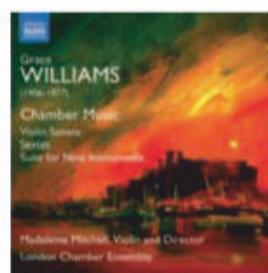
Romanza. Rondo for Dancing. Sarabande.

Sextet. Suite for Nine Instruments. Violin Sonata

London Chamber Ensemble /

Madeleine Mitchell vn

Naxos ⑤ 8 571380 (72' • DDD)



Grace Williams isn't exactly neglected in the concert hall – at least not in Wales, where every orchestral musician, amateur or pro, must surely have played her *Fantasia on Welsh Nursery Tunes*. But the pieces on this disc – premiere recordings, every one – are unquestionably rarities, though it's to be hoped that with such passionate and persuasive advocacy they won't stay that way for long.

Williams's chamber works are generally early or minor pieces, most of them languishing in the National Library of Wales until rediscovered by Madeleine Mitchell and her colleagues. In the case of the Violin Sonata – written while Williams was studying with Egon Wellesz in

Vienna – the composer herself judged the outer movements 'not good enough'. Mitchell and pianist David Owen Norris clearly disagree, and find an arresting blend of biting rhythmic energy and stormy lyricism.

Similar qualities permeate the *Suite for Nine Instruments* (1934) – described by Mitchell as 'Stravinskian', though in fact it has real heart, as well as a powerful sense of momentum and a slow movement whose brooding, overcast atmosphere is superbly caught in this urgent performance. The longest work on the disc – the 1931 *Sextet* for oboe, trumpet, piano and strings – is more expansive, but the London Chamber Ensemble play it with just as much conviction and a real ear for Williams's unexpected shafts of poetic sunlight (listen to the oboe after 8'50" in the first movement).

The shorter pieces, each lovingly played, show just how much melodic character Williams could fit into a tiny form; Norris's account of the imposing left-hand *Sarabande* ought to propel it straight into the concert repertoire. A powerful musical personality, well served by some gripping interpretations. More, please. **Richard Bratby**

'Ascent'

Assad Metamorfose Bowen Phantasy, Op 54

Knox Fuga libre Schumann Märchenbilder, Op 113 Shostakovich Impromptu, Op 33

Waxman Carmen Fantasia

Matthew Lipman va Henry Kramer pf

Cedille ⑤ CDR90000 184 (65' • DDD)



Another chipping from Shostakovich's workbench here receives its first recording, in the shape of an Impromptu almost certainly composed for the viola player of the Glazunov Quartet but only discovered in 2017 in the collection of the Beethoven Quartet's Vadim Borisovsky. Composed in May 1931, in the middle of work on the first act of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, its gentle lyricism, topped off by a startlingly brief *Allegro*, has the sketchy feel of the piano Preludes and parts of the First Piano Concerto from the years immediately following. The opus number was eventually assigned to Shostakovich's film score to *The Counterplan*.

Anyone who invests in Matthew Lipman's disc for this tasty two-minute morsel alone will find plenty more treats in store. York Bowen's *Phantasy* has all his signature post-Romantic sweep, underpinned by solid craftsmanship.



Poise and wit: pianist Tom Poster and cellist Guy Johnston with record producer Andrew Keener in The Stoller Hall at Chetham's School of Music

The Brazilian-American composer Clarice Assad contributes two sensitive and engaging pieces in memory of the viola player's mother. Every one of Schumann's four *Märchenbilder* is a treasure, the last being perhaps especially touching, conveying as it does the fragility of a lullaby to a child perhaps longed for but never actually brought into the world. Garth Knox's solo *Fuga libre* holds the attention by virtue of motivic resourcefulness allied to textural imagination. Finally the Waxman *Carmen Fantasia*, familiar as virtuoso violin fodder but recorded here for the first time on the viola, gives Lipman the chance to indulge his entertainer skills to the full.

Throughout the recital Lipman's playing is warm-toned and expressive, as well as agile and focused, and Henry Kramer provides exemplary flexible partnership. The instruments are ideally balanced in a clear yet glowing acoustic. In short: an eminently collectable disc. **David Fanning**

'Themes and Variations'

Beethoven Variations on 'Bei Männern', WoO46
Chopin Introduction and Polonaise brillante, Op 3
Fauré Romance, Op 69
MacMillan Kiss on Wood
Martinů Variations on a Theme of Rossini, H290
Mendelssohn Variations

concertantes, Op 17
Rachmaninov Prelude, Op 2 No 1. Vocalise, Op 34 No 14
Saint-Saëns Carnaval des animaux - Le cygne
Schubert Auf dem Strom, D943^a
Schumann Adagio and Allegro, Op 70
Guy Johnston vc **Tom Poster** pf
^a**James Gilchrist** ten
Orchid © ORC100095 (75' • DDD)



It takes a particularly selfless kind of cellist to begin a recital with Beethoven's *Bei Männern* Variations. Donald Tovey once said that Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* was 'about as suited for the display of a virtuoso's powers as a bath-chair for a world speed record', and the same goes for this innocuous if fiddly salon morsel. Beethoven didn't even dignify it with an opus number, and it puts the piano, rather than the cello, front and centre.

Nothing intrinsically wrong with that, of course, and Tom Poster plays with poise and wit, just as Guy Johnston handles the assorted grunts and squiggles that Beethoven allocates to the cello with real eloquence. The pair's long musical partnership, engagingly described in the

booklet notes, is audible throughout. Johnston's tone is focused, translucent and warm; and though the recorded sound tends to favour Poster, that merely heightens the sense of intimacy in the Fauré and Rachmaninov miniatures. There's a slight jolt as the tenor James Gilchrist joins the team for an unaffected reading of Schubert's 'Auf dem Strom'; a more equal three-way recorded balance might have enhanced the feeling of chamber music.

But it does all rather point up the problem with a disc planned around (mostly) Romantic salon pieces, however affectionately played. Whether it's Mendelssohn, Beethoven or Chopin, there are a lot of empty calories here, and you land with some relief on the zesty, wrong-note bravura of Martinů's *Rossini* Variations, and a superb account of James MacMillan's *Kiss on Wood* that continues to ring and resonate even as it withdraws – with perfect control – into silence. They're worth the price of admission but listeners on a low-sugar diet should be warned: they're not typical. **Richard Bratby**

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Alfredo Kraus

Richard Fairman recalls the career of a tenor who guaranteed vocal class, particularly in the lighter French and Italian operatic roles, thanks to his impeccably schooled technique

By the middle of the 1970s Alfredo Kraus was at his peak. His career, built on singing the lighter Italian and French operas, took him regularly to the world's top opera houses and he was about to make some of his most important recordings.

He might well have expected uncritical praise, but that was not quite how it turned out when I saw him in *La traviata* at the Royal Opera House in 1977. Unlike some tenors at the time, Kraus generously treated his audience to the cabaletta after 'De' miei bollenti spiriti' and rounded it off with a ringing top C. He left the stage to cheers, but a few seconds later was back, treating himself to a long bow.

Suddenly a few isolated boos mingled with the applause. Kraus looked shocked, then uncomprehending. Hadn't he just delivered some fine, elegant singing and capped it with a top C that would be the envy of most tenors? Yes, but a handful of people in the audience objected to him breaking the dramatic spell. A decade or two earlier, returning for a bow might have been standard practice, but not now.

That little scene sums up something of the essence of Kraus's artistry. At a time when most tenors were fitted for the big Verdi and Puccini roles, and directors' opera was starting to make headway, Kraus hailed back to an earlier era. Singing was what he was about, not new dramatic realism. Tito Schipa was his model, *bel canto* elegance his watchword.

His other roles in London around that time formed the core of his repertoire. There was a glittering revival of Gounod's *Faust*, in which he shone alongside the husband-and-wife team of Nicolai Ghiaurov and Mirella Freni; a distinguished *Werther*, sung with patrician authority; and Gennaro in *Lucrezia Borgia*, partnering Joan Sutherland, a regular colleague on the operatic stage.

All were faultlessly sung thanks to his secure technique. Defining his

priorities in an interview for *Opera* magazine, Kraus said, 'The stage forms the artist, but ruins the singer. And I, by profession, am a singer ... Technique is the basis of everything. You cannot be a singer if you are not first a vocal technician, and you cannot be a good artist if you are not first a good singer.'

An Alfredo Kraus performance was a guarantee of vocal class. His voice was slim but not small, a concentrated beam of sound that reached the back of the theatre without strain. There would be finely shaped lines, perfectly even tone, easy top notes, but not necessarily much light and shade, or spontaneity.

There is a live DVD of that *Lucrezia Borgia* on Opus Arte and it is fascinating to look back on it. Kraus is what might be termed an old-fashioned actor, but we never

question why we are watching. The singing is impeccably schooled, every vulgarity expunged, and yet there is intensity, thanks to his high-tensile tone. Once again his main aria ends with a ringing high C and – yes – a pair of half-modest, little bows. No boos this time, though.

Kraus knew his repertoire and never ventured beyond his limits. Among the commercial recordings of him in the *bel canto* repertoire, his exemplary *I puritani* with Caballé and Muti is perhaps the best. His Verdi roles include the Duke of Mantua in Solti's *Rigoletto*, a high point, together with a *Traviata* under Muti, and both operas again in less recommendable versions alongside Beverly Sills.

The light French Romantic repertoire equally proved a happy hunting ground. As well as *Faust*, a regular favourite, he sang in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*, *Les pêcheurs de perles*, and in later years *Les contes d'Hoffmann*. It was a pair of Massenet roles, though, in which he was most prominent: Des Grieux in *Manon*, and *Werther*. He recorded both with Michel Plasson

His voice was slim but not small, a concentrated beam of sound that reached the back of the hall without strain

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1927 – Born in Las Palmas, Canary Islands

He trains for a degree in electrical engineering, but in his twenties decides to further his ambitions as a singer

• 1956 – Formal operatic debut

After performances in zarzuela, Kraus makes his debut in opera in Cairo, singing the Duke in *Rigoletto* and his only performances as Cavaradossi in *Tosca*

• 1958 – The Lisbon *La traviata*

He plays Alfredo to Maria Callas's Violetta, spawning countless pirate discs and finally an official, EMI/Warner, historic live recording

• 1966 – Debut at the Metropolitan Opera

The Duke in *Rigoletto* is his debut role in New York, the first of a dozen roles at the Met

• 1979 – The year of *Werther*

He sings *Werther*, the heaviest role in his repertory, at the Met and Covent Garden, and makes his EMI recording of the opera

• 1990 – International Singing Competition established

Following a break after Kraus's death in 1999, the Concurso Internacional de Canto Alfredo Kraus is now active again



Kraus makes his debut at the Met in 1966 as the Duke in *Rigoletto*

as conductor and they count among his major achievements.

In an interview with *Gramophone* in 1980 Kraus said of Werther: 'One has to find a way of communicating with the audience while at the same time retaining the essentially introvert nature of his personality.' Seeing him and Carreras in short succession at Covent Garden made a telling

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Massenet *Werther*
Kraus, Troyanos,
Manuguerra,
Barbaux,
Bastin; LPO /
Michel Plasson
Warner Classics
(2/80)

comparison: Kraus formal and studied, but singing with long-breathed elegance, Carreras heartbreakingly romantic as the young poet, but vocally effortful.

Kraus kept singing well into his sixties, little touched by age, or by the changing fashions in the opera world. His virtues were of a timeless kind, as his recordings are there to bear witness. **G**

Instrumental



Marc Rochester enjoys Widor's organ symphonies from Christian Schmitt:

'Where Schmitt can keep command of his fingers and enthusiasm, the results are breathtaking' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



Patrick Rucker hears a Romantic recital from Alexander Krichel:

'Krichel plays Rachmaninov's Kreisler transcriptions for all their worth, savouring their fragrance and lilt' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 73**

JS Bach

Solo Violin Sonatas and Partitas, BWV1001-1006

Jaakko Kuusisto vn

BIS (F) (2) BIS2197 (141' • DDD/DSD)



There are interesting aspects to this set, the first to strike me being the resonant acoustic of the Österåker Church in Sweden, which makes for a special sense of atmosphere. This possibly also had some bearing on Jaakko Kuusisto's choices of tempo – in the last movement of the Third Partita, for example, which, though nicely phrased, is quite measured in comparison with, say, the more vivacious Isabelle Faust (Harmonia Mundi, 6/10, 11/12). Another point is Kuusisto's employment of vibrato, which is fairly intense at the start of the First Sonata (though not as emotively charged as Hilary Hahn on her recent recording – Decca, 11/18), whereas Faust and Alina Ibragimova (Hyperion, 11/09) favour a cool, tremor-free line. On the other hand, in the opening Allemanda of the First Partita, Kuusisto too dispenses with vibrato. Rhythm provides another interesting point for discussion, the way Kuusisto underlines the siciliano flow of the G minor Sonata's third movement; here Hahn, like Heifetz many years before her, is more intent on stressing the music's expressive potential, and returning to her recording reinforces my high assessment of it.

When it comes to dynamics Kuusisto is at his most impressive in the sonata finales, the G minor and C major especially. In the latter's great Fugue I found the opening minutes refreshing in their gentle sense of play but, come the inversion (5'28", again with some vibrato admitted), the music sounds rather more laboured. Conspicuous stresses seem to be something of an issue, such as the opening chords of the E major Partita's Bourrée and their subsequent appearance later on. Listen to Faust and that sense of 'tugging' is entirely

absent. No big deal, but I found these gestures mildly distracting.

So a nice set that yields much tellingly observed detail. Were you to chance upon these monumental works for the first time in the company of Jaakko Kuusisto, you certainly wouldn't be short-changed. But at the final reckoning, among digital contenders in the complete set, Faust, Ibragimova and, for a period-instrument option, Giuliano Carmignola (DG, 2/19) are all in my view preferable, certainly as first ports of call. As to vintage options, Heifetz (RCA), Milstein (Warner or DG), Szeryng or Grumiaux (both Decca) will offer countless hours of pleasure, one way or the other. **Rob Cowan**

JS Bach

JS Bach Cantata No 147 - Jesu, joy of man's desiring (arr Hess). Cantata No 208 - Sheep may safely graze (arr Petri). Capriccio on the Departure of his Beloved Brother, BWV992. Fantasia and Fugue, BWV904. Flute Sonata No 2, BWV1031 - Siciliano (arr Kempff). Fugue, BWV878 (arr Grainger). Nun freut' euch, lieben Christen g'mein, BWV734 (arr Busoni). Prelude, BWV555 (arr Siloti). Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004 - Chaconne (arr Busoni). Solo Violin Partita No 3, BWV1006 - Suite (arr Rachmaninov) **Grainger** Blithe Bells

Jayson Gillham pf

ABC Classics (F) 481 7686 (66' • DDD)



Jayson Gillham's is the most enjoyable and worthwhile disc of hyphenated Bach since Hannes Minnaar's (Cobra, 1/14) and Þóringur Ólafsson's (DG, 11/18). The three share some repertoire but not enough to make you choose between them, and all have been finely recorded.

I particularly warmed to Gillham's cushioned, rounded tone, more engaging than Ólafsson's refined, airy detachment: there is not a single bar in the 19 tracks that doesn't sound lovely. He is a storyteller, as is obvious from the

opening Fugue in E major (No 9 from Book 2 of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*), 'Busonified' by Percy Grainger with octave doublings and other devices. That impression is reinforced by the Bach-Rachmaninov Suite from the E major Violin Partita, as witty and sprightly in the outer movements as it is elegant and knowing in the Gavotte, and a far cry from Daniil Trifonov's recent drab offering (DG, 11/18). Indeed, many of these performances must bear comparison with famous recordings of the past by the likes of Rachmaninov, Myra Hess and Dinu Lipatti. Gillham comes up trumps every time.

I also like the way he lightens the tone and uses less pedal in the two original Bach pieces in the programme (Fantasia and Fugue in A minor, BWV904, originally for harpsichord, and *Capriccio on the Departure of his Beloved Brother*, BWV992). At the other end of the scale, so to speak, and using the piano's full resources, is the mighty Bach-Busoni Chaconne in what is unquestionably among the best performances on disc. For one thing Gillham is at pains to let you hear every note of Busoni's inflation (including small details as, for instance, the three bars of left-hand semiquaver triplets at 9'20", rarely as well defined as this) without compromising the overall arc of the piece. It is a cohesive whole with a strong narrative sense in which the frequent changes of pulse and tempo simply flow organically from one to another.

Another reason for warming to this young Australian-British pianist is because in the few pieces here which your reviewer himself plays (*Sheep may safely graze*, *Siciliano*, *Jesu, joy*), Gillham plays them in exactly the same way – or at least exactly the way your reviewer imagines he plays them. **Jeremy Nicholas**

JS Bach

Six English Suites, BWV806-811

Masaaki Suzuki hpd

BIS (F) (2) BIS2281 (153' • DDD/DSD)



A natural storyteller: Jayson Gillham impresses in a disc of transcriptions of Bach



Forkel's pioneering biography of Bach may mention a suite 'made for an Englishman of rank', but that is where the Englishness ends for Bach's earliest significant dance set for keyboard. In reality, any performer engaging with these six chewy suites will know that it's the French to whom Bach is primarily doffing his cap, with the Italian concerto making a special mark in the A minor, G minor and F major preludes.

Viewing the *English Suites* as a kind of laboratory of experiment in style management by a young composer striding forth, combining unabashed extroversion with unwieldy prolixity, is what has undoubtedly led to their relatively recent sympathetic treatment. Masaaki Suzuki's new account sits alongside a number of seriously good readings from the last few years including Ketil Haugsand's exceptionally richly coloured recording (Simax, 9/13). One suspects that the indigenous 'l'art de toucher le clavecin' is afforded more opportunity in these large canvases – the framing suites are half an hour each – than in almost all other Bach.

Suzuki, as we've come to expect in all his Bach projects, takes an exacting view of the

music in terms of how the composer's voice can be most directly and effectively communicated without artifice. The logic and pacing of the preludes are balanced by Willem Kroesbergen's (after Ruckers) warmly voiced instrument, which allows Suzuki to trumpet the bold rhythmic gestures of the courantes and gigues alongside his internalising of Bach's most personal selection of sarabandes. Particularly affectionately delivered are Suzuki's allemandes: sweet, gracious and never cloying. There's less of the poetic placement, timing and ambition of Haugsand's spontaneous and varied essays but, instead, a consistency of approach which reassures us of the incremental merits of this mixed collection.

If there is one attribute that draws me to Suzuki's distinctive outlook, it's the attention he gives to the tenderness of intersecting lines. While Bach's early counterpoint can occasionally obfuscate melodic direction, Suzuki calculates the means of illuminating the way through patience and skilful textural control. The Courante of the G minor Suite is a case in point, as is the quiet nobility of the F major Allemande or the infusion of unalloyed pathos in the E minor Sarabande. That said, there is always an equally uplifting and visceral energy to balance the reflective movements. The D minor Prelude can

easily drown in its own juices but here it swings for all of its eight glorious minutes. Such levels of finely honed judgement, drawn from Suzuki's rich experience and deeply considered musicianship, never fail to make an impression on listeners.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Boulanger · Fauré · Messiaen

Boulanger Prelude in D flat **Fauré** Preludes, Op 103 **Messiaen** Préludes

Alexandra Dariescu pf

Champs Hill (CHRC149 (64' · DDD)



The UK-based Romanian pianist Alexandra Dariescu continues her survey of various prelude cycles with Fauré and Messiaen. It commences with a gripping curtain-raiser in the form of Lili Boulanger's D flat major Prelude. Dariescu communicates the music's brooding atmosphere, imaginative register deployment and shattering climactic descending passages in octaves: all qualities that attest to this tragically short-lived composer's substantial talent and expressive powers.

Fauré's Op 103 Preludes further demonstrate Dariescu's artistic ripening



Carl Nielsen
Solo Concertos



Andreas Sundén Malin Broman Anders Jonhäll

Three leading soloists

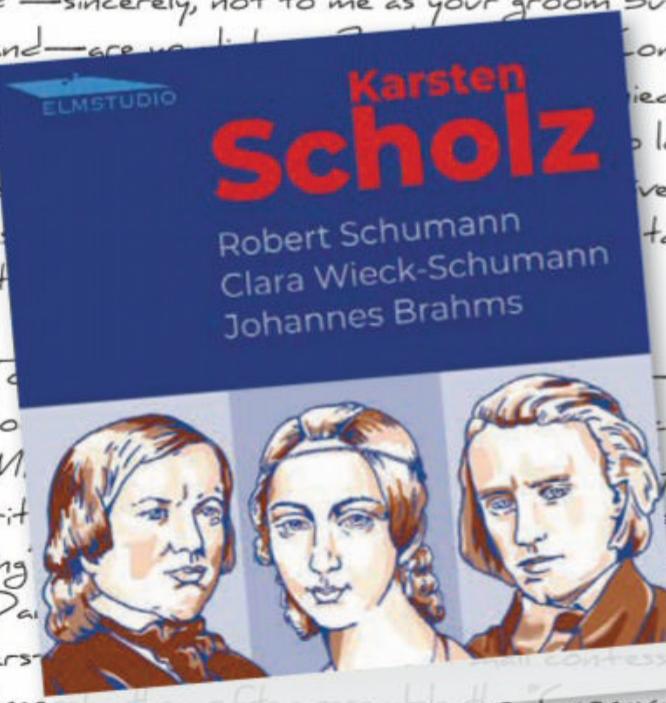
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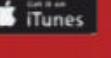
At 3 o'clock ... Tell me how you think about the "Fantasy Pieces" and "Dances of the League of David"—sincerely, not to me as your groom but your husband—are we likely to be ... Confused by ... long ... I have the talk to ...



Karsten Scholz

Robert Schumann
Clara Wieck-Schumann
Johannes Brahms

46. To 9 o'clock for M. favorite Evening the "Dai I unders ... you since they often resemble the "Carnaval" too much, which is the dearest of these smaller pieces that you wrote; I love it beyond all measure and romanticise while playing it ...

amazon.com  



Captivating: Alexander Soares makes a strong debut in works by Boulez, Dutilleux and Messiaen

and growing assurance since her solo CD debut (A/12). She wields a light yet shapely hand over the first prelude's accompaniment, giving just enough emphasis to the composer's delicately wrought dissonances, although No 2's rapidly fluttering right-hand patterns lack Jeffrey Swann's supple finish (Music & Arts) or Louis Lortie's steely scintillation (Chandos, 11/16). But she captures No 4's lyrical innocence, almost in the manner of a disarming folk singer. In No 5 Dariescu's phrasing tellingly accounts for Fauré's subtle harmonic shifts, even if Lortie gives stronger voice to the cross-rhythmic writing. She brings out the delicacy and austerity of No 6's sparse counterpoint with a pellucid touch and scarcely a drop of pedal, letting the fingers do the work. Similar control and refinement on Dariescu's part ideally suit No 7's deceptively simple melody/inner-voice/bass-line texture; her convincingly understated interpretation makes this prelude sound like one of Fauré's songs, minus the words. The final prelude represents Fauré's idiom distilled to its essence, without a trace of artifice. Here I find Dariescu's plain-spoken pianism appropriate, yet a trifle reticent and bland when measured alongside Germaine Thyssens-Valentin's firmer linear contours (Testament).

Perhaps Messiaen's early *Préludes* provide a more variegated canvas for Dariescu's sensitivity and ear for colour to flourish, which is why her leisurely pacing of 'Chant d'extase dans un paysage triste' doesn't drag. In 'Les sons impalpables du rêve' Dariescu's left hand sets the agenda, with the animated right-hand chords less to the fore than in Pierre-Laurent Aimard's hands (DG, 11/08). But No 6's chiming chord climaxes sit rather squarely here, whereas Yvonne Loriod (Decca) and Peter Hill (Delphian, 12/14) keep them moving and resonating. A fine disc overall, especially considering Matthew Bennett's excellent production values and Jessica Duchen's stylish and informative annotations. **Jed Distler**

Boulez · Dutilleux · Messiaen

'Notations & Sketches'

Boulez Notations. *Une page d'éphéméride*
Dutilleux Mini-prélude en éventail. Piano
 Sonata. *Préludes* **Messiaen** *La fauvette passerinette*. Prélude

Alexander Soares pf

Rubicon (RCD1016 (72' · DDD)



Although most of these pieces have been collated on various anthologies of French

piano music, few of them can match this new release in its balanced conception or consistency of execution. This is evident from the opening bars of Dutilleux's Sonata (1948), its influences of Debussy and Ravel countered by those of Bartók and Prokofiev, most notably in the final 'Choral et variations', whose sinewy progress to a resolute apotheosis is powerfully rendered. The three *Préludes* (1973-88) afford a compendium of Dutilleux's compositional techniques, with 'Le jeu des contraires' a competition test-piece as fastidious as it is resourceful; whereas *Mini-prélude en éventail* (1987) is his capricious 'hommage' to a century of French pianism.

The Boulez pieces neatly frame the extent of his composing. *Notations* (1945) has become something of a party-piece since its belated publication, these 12 miniatures encompassing a range of expression that Soares conveys without losing sight of their cohesion as a sequence. *Une page d'éphéméride* (2005) is a 'young person's guide' to modern piano-writing whose alternation of stark resonance and incisive passagework is Boulezian to the core. As to the Messiaen offerings, the recently discovered *La fauvette passerinette* (1961) may have been intended for a putative second *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, though the virtuosity of its evocation is closer to the multifaceted imagery of *La fauvette des jardins* almost a decade on, while the

Prélude (1964) is a tensile *feuille d'album* which ought to become established as an encore.

It rounds off the recital in captivating fashion. All these pieces are available elsewhere – the Dutilleux and Boulez in respective surveys by Robert Levin (ECM, 8/10) and Marc Ponthus (Bridge, 4/16), and the Messiaen within an engrossing miscellany from Peter Hill (Delphian, 12/14) – but Soares has their measure in abundance, resulting in what could hardly be a more auspicious debut album.

Richard Whitehouse

Franck

Prélude, aria et final. Prélude, choral et fugue.

Violin Sonata (transcr Cortot)

Michael Korstick *pf*

CPO  CPO555 242-2 (70' • DDD)



On the surface, Michael Korstick's interpretation of Franck's *Prélude, choral et fugue* is a model of control and forethought, with the piano-writing's frequently thick textures resonating with fullness and clarity. In the Prelude Korstick sometimes undermines the change of character when new themes appear. For example, the chordal theme that more decidedly manifests itself in the Fugue (41 seconds into track 1) seems a tad held back in regard to Franck's *a capriccio* directive, which Massimo Giuseppe Bianchi (Decca) strikingly animates. On the other hand, Korstick voices the movement's imitative sequences to three-dimensional effect. If the Chorale's majestic rolled chords don't match Sviatoslav Richter's translucent shimmer, Korstick grabs your attention through his keen attention to inner voices and his shaping of the bass lines. Wide dynamic contrasts and discreet tenutos give both contour and continuity to the Fugue, even if Korstick's tone becomes monochrome in the music's loudest moments (something I often notice in his recordings).

Korstick's opening movement of the *Prélude, aria et final* is one of the finest on record, with its fluid and flexible *maestoso* pace and delightfully 'old school' balancing of chords. The pianist's use of colour and rubato highlights the tension and release of the music's restless harmonic wanderlust, as well as circumventing its potential for bombast. However, Korstick's virtuoso command of the third movement's interlocking passages and stamina-challenging octaves doesn't quite match

Stephen Hough's supple scintillation (Hyperion, 4/97).

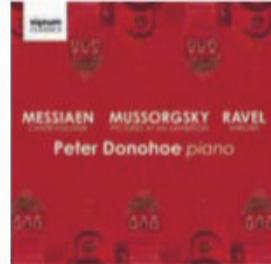
Alfred Cortot's solo-piano recasting of Franck's Violin Sonata largely leaves the original scoring intact, save for several unavoidable register changes. As a consequence, the pianist must do the work of two people, particularly in the second movement, where the swirling piano part can potentially engulf the violin melody. Korstick plows through the music like a horse wearing blinders, in contrast to the cleaner textural differentiation of He Yue (Grand Piano) and Yukie Nagai (BIS). The latter pianists prove suaver and more straightforward in the finale, although Korstick's expressive touches and pronounced separation of lines minimise the keyboard layout's occasional piles of clutter. For the most part, the strong and sometimes overheated personalities of Franck the composer and Korstick the pianist suit each other well. **Jed Distler**

Mussorgsky • Messiaen • Ravel

Messiaen Cantéyodjayâ Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition Ravel Miroirs

Peter Donohoe *pf*

Signum  SIGCD566 (73' • DDD)



If technicolour accounts of Mussorgsky's *Pictures* are not your thing, and you wish the pianist wasn't determined to make the instrument imitate Ravel's orchestration, Peter Donohoe's approach may be the one for you. Unlike Andreas Haefliger's sleepwalking dreamer, his promenader marches purposefully forwards, while the pictures themselves are firmly delineated, neither adding to nor subtracting from the score, except in the slight rushing towards the end of 'The Great Gate of Kiev'. Free of any superficial gloss, Donohoe's 'pictures' have something of the low-lit icons on display in the dark rooms of Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery. So don't expect a Goya-esque 'Gnomus', and be prepared for some very literally measured tremolos in 'Con mortuis in lingua mortua'. Yet along the way rest assured that the gargantuan 'Bydło' will shake you to the core.

Colours are suitably more vivid in Donohoe's Ravel. There is bewildering clarity in the dreaded repeated notes of 'Alborada', while the flickers of the night moths of the 'Noctuelles' and the loneliness of 'L'oiseau triste' are sharply evoked. But compared to the visceral thrills of Bertrand

Chamayou, here the ocean of 'Une barque' lacks elemental surge and the jester of the 'del gracioso' is under-characterised.

Plenty of fine threads tie the pieces on this disc together. Not only are there various direct and indirect connections between the three composers but each piece links music and visual/poetic objects. Messiaen's exotic-experimental *Cantéyodjayâ* is a perfect musical realisation of an abstract mosaic, not least in Donohoe's brightly faceted interpretation, whose chiselled textures and sharply defined lines make this, for me, by some distance the highlight of the disc. **Michelle Assay**

Mussorgsky – selected comparison:

Haefliger (6/18) (BIS) BIS2307

Ravel – selected comparison:

Chamayou (3/16) (ERAT) 2564 60268-1

Prokofiev • Stravinsky • Tchaikovsky

Prokofiev Six Pieces from Cinderella, Op 102

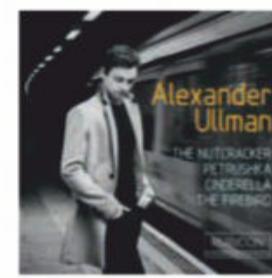
Stravinsky The Firebird – Suite (arr Agosti).

Three Movements from Petrushka **Tchaikovsky**

The Nutcracker – Suite, Op 71a (arr Pletnev)

Alexander Ullman *pf*

Rubicon  RCD1029 (68' • DDD)



It's just not fair. The pianist is marvellous and the programme is attractive. But the brittle, drier-than-dry recorded sound really doesn't help. Alexander Ullman was the winner of the 2017 International Franz Liszt Competition in Utrecht and the 2011 one in Budapest (confusingly there is more than one International Liszt Competition; in fact there are more than two). He combines sensitivity and agility at the highest level, which should make a programme like this one the perfect vehicle. His *Nutcracker* comes very close to Pletnev's own in its clarity and even tempos, and his dazzling account of *Petrushka*, though not on a par with Pollini's sonic boom (who is?), very nearly deserves a place alongside the finest of recent recordings, such as Melnikov's (who retains the edge for range of colour).

Aye, there's the rub. Whether or not it's entirely the fault of the recording is hard to judge; but throughout the disc the timbre remains resolutely piano-bound, and for transcriptions the one thing you can't do without is the capacity to suggest orchestral colour. If characterisation were all, it would be very different, because in this respect Ullman is unfailingly balletic. Compare, for instance, the grace of his *en pointe* take on Prokofiev's *Cinderella* to Boris Berman's

bulkier textures. As for Guido Agosti's flashy but over-conventionalised transcription of *Firebird* – shown up as such by the juxtaposition with the composer's own of *Petrushka* – Ullman is less effective in bringing out the excitement of the 'Danse infernale' or the exuberance of the shimmering tremolos of the finale. For more panache and flair in this instance, go with Alexandre Kantorow.

But it does seem unfair to find fault with the playing when the recorded sound itself is so limiting. I can't wait to hear Ullman under better conditions. **Michelle Assay**

Petrushka – selected comparison:

Melnikov (4/18) (HARM) HMM90 2299

Firebird – selected comparison:

A Kantorow (7/17) (BIS) BIS2150

Rădulescu

'Hommage à Horațiu Rădulescu – Complete Works for Piano'

Ortwin Stürmer pf Frankfurt Radio

Symphony Orchestra / Lothar Zagrosek

Neos (F) (3) NEOS11805/7 (171' • DDD/DSD)



Although he never quite made the transition from cult artist to mainstream

composer, Horațiu Rădulescu (1942–2008) is widely regarded as a seminal figure in post-war European music, as this collection of his complete works for piano goes some way towards confirming.

Certain defining aspects were evident from the start: the sudden upsurges and 'outbursts' of silence that disrupt the elegant serial writing of *Omaggio a Domenico Scarlatti* (1967) or the apocalyptic imagery of the First Sonata (1968 – likely inspired by Scriabin's Fourth Sonata) indicate just where his music was heading. Based in Paris from 1969, Rădulescu evolved a 'spectral' thinking based on the natural harmonics of the sound spectrum – one in which the piano, with its tuning predicated on equal temperament, ostensibly had minimal part to play.

Having initially reinvented it as a retuned 'sound icon', Rădulescu belatedly returned to the instrument when amalgamating his innovations with the possibilities of the tempered scale. Inspired by the Taoist philosopher Lao Zhu, the next three piano sonatas emerged in relatively quick succession (1991–93). Their formal proportions and musical content may be determined by spectral considerations but listeners can also detect the harmonic explorations of Bartók and Enescu, the textural hallmarks

of Ligeti and even the rhythmic intricacies of Nancarrow.

The final two sonatas appeared during the next decade, their idiom enriched by elements of the Romanian folk music that Rădulescu drew on increasingly in his later work. Also present is a modal subtlety that makes the Fifth Sonata (2003) the most poised of the cycle, while the lengthy opening movement of the Sixth Sonata (2007) emerges as a process of variation on a motivic cell that brings Rădulescu's various philosophical and musical conceptions into a heady and eloquent summation wholly befitting of the composer's final completed work.

Ortwin Stürmer was crucial in encouraging Rădulescu's return to the piano, having premiered Sonatas Nos 2–4 as well as the Piano Concerto (1996), which places its composer's thinking within a more inclusive, even panoramic context. Only the first of these discs is newly recorded but the other two have been remastered to convey the precision and panache of Stürmer's pianism with impressive clarity. Booklet notes and presentation are exemplary even by Neos's high standards and this set is cordially recommended as an exemplar for a composer like no other.

Richard Whitehouse



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A new and refreshing interpretation of Mozart's violin sonatas, performed on mandolin and piano by **Shmuel Elbaz** and **Asaf Kleinman**.

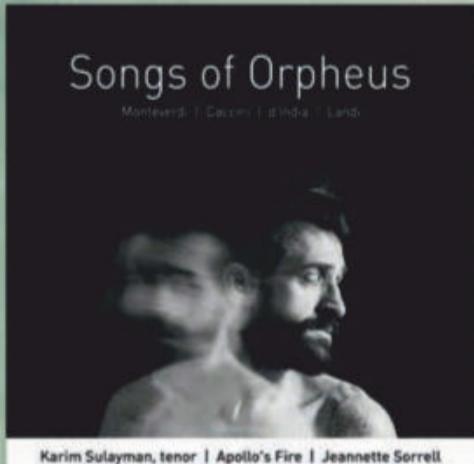
This fascinating release sheds new light on Mozart's music. The sense of equality between protagonists in Mozart's mature violin sonatas lends itself to the pairing of mandolin and piano; the mandolin shares the tuning of the violin, enabling it to adapt effortlessly to this repertoire. Mozart himself was familiar with the mandolin, which is given a solo during 'Deh, vieni alla finestra' in *Don Giovanni*. Hailed as the "Paganini of the mandolin", Shmuel Elbaz is an award-winning mandolin artist, joined for this album by acclaimed pianist Asaf Kleinman.

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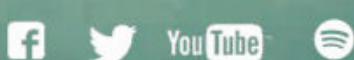
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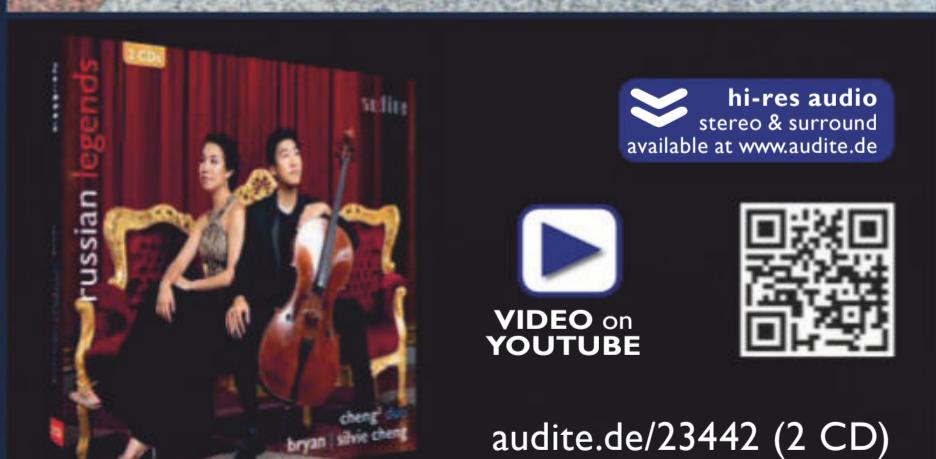
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Say

The Moving Mansion (Yürüyen Köşk), Op 72a. Sari Gelin (Art of Piano 2). Troy Sonata, Op 78. Winter Morning in Istanbul (Art of Piano 3)

Fazıl Say *pf*

Warner Classics ② 9029 55046-5 (62' • DDD)



You don't have to know that Fazıl Say's 10-part *Troy Sonata* is a musical parallel to Homer's *Iliad* in order to perceive the music for what it really is. For example, will the second movement's inventively swirling gusts of arpeggios evoke the image of 'Aegean Winds' to those who partake in blind listening? Why don't we call the movement 'Nantucket Sunshower' instead, an equally plausible title? Similarly, Say's fusion of Prokofiev and progressive rock recasts the 'Heroes of Troy' as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. 'Sparta' contains lovely delicate passages, embroidered with percussive effects. By contrast, the mawkish love theme depicting Helen of Troy is basically watered-down Michel Legrand; but, then again, Say's melodies are rarely memorable. The eighth movement ('The War') is predictably boisterous, full of pounding bass notes and string scraping. Say churns out more of the same in the 'Trojan Horse' movement.

Say's four-part suite *The Moving Mansion* works best when the composer showcases his lyrical side in the first and third movements, and is least convincing when he tries to generate climaxes through crude repetition, which is not the same thing as forward momentum. 'Sari Gelin', from Say's *Art of Piano*, similarly embodies these strongest and weakest aspects of his piano-writing.

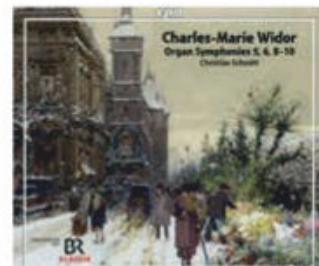
There's no question that Say puts his ideas across with confidence and communicative immediacy. After a while, however, his limited bag of tricks become predictable. He really should compose for films. **Jed Distler**

Widor

Organ Symphonies - No 5, Op 42 No 1; No 6, Op 42 No 2; No 8, Op 42 No 4; No 9, 'Gothic', Op 70; No 10, 'Roman', Op 73

Christian Schmitt *org*

CPO ② 700 777 706-2 (3h 2' • DDD/DSD)
Played on the Cavaillé-Coll organ of the St Ouen Abbey Church, Rouen



Time was when Charles-Marie Widor was known only for his

Toccata in F, which, in all its multitudinous recorded versions, only occasionally acknowledged the fact that it came from his Fifth Symphony. It seems like only yesterday that Widor was regarded as a one-work composer. How times have changed. Today his extensive, wide-ranging output is generously represented in the catalogues, with almost a dozen currently available versions of one or more of his 10 massive symphonies for solo organ.

It is perhaps unfortunate that Christian Schmitt's recordings come hot on the heels of Joseph Nolan's excellent Widor cycle, for Nolan's combination of vivid virtuosity, towering technique and inspired interpretative intensity, coupled with excellent recordings from Signum Classics, makes his set the current yardstick in Widor symphony recordings. For all the obvious eagerness in this playing, Schmitt never really reaches the heights of excellence which are so consistent in Nolan's recordings. That said, there is still much to relish here.

Widor conceived his symphonies for various organs around France, but the one thing they had in common was that they were all built by Aristide Cavaillé-Coll and featured the unique tonal qualities – roaring reeds, haunting flutes and captivating solo stops – by which a Cavaillé-Coll is instantly recognisable. It is appropriate, therefore, that Schmitt should have recorded these symphonies on one of Cavaillé-Coll's greatest creations, the organ of St Ouen in Rouen (which was also the instrument for which the Ninth Symphony was conceived). This organ is itself well represented in the catalogue, and perhaps one seeking the truest representation of the organ's sound might look to one of those other recordings to get a better taste of the instrument: this one is strangely boxy and distant, as if recorded from behind a closed door; and while the organ's charms are much in evidence, the generally distant and fuzzy sound tends to be more atmospheric than illuminating.

In his playing Schmitt certainly does not want for enthusiasm, even to the point of occasionally allowing it to get the better of his technique. His very brisk romp through the *Allegro cantabile* movement of the Fifth leads to a flurry of minor accidents, while the dark opening of the Ninth wallows around as if in some kind of primeval mud which obscures a lot of detail, although it beautifully conveys the *Gothique* implications of the Symphony's title. But where he can keep command of his fingers and enthusiasm, the results are breathtaking – note particularly his scintillating performance of the Sixth

Symphony's Intermezzo and the stirring rhythmic impetus that underpins his expansive account of the finale of the Tenth Symphony.

The upside of Schmitt's unflagging enthusiasm for this music are some truly committed performances which draw you into a musical world in which effect and gesture count for more than precision and clarity. Here is a player who obviously loves this music, relishes its opportunities for exploring the tonal resources of this magnificent organ and gets right down into the very soul of the music. In short, where the fingers slip or the command weakens, the emotion drives it all along with arresting persuasiveness.

In one key area, this set from CPO comprehensively outshines the Signum discs: in the booklet documentation. Instead of the often obtuse and pretentious essays of the latter, we have fulsome commentary and discussion from a couple of writers which not only put the music in its context and detail its historical and textural foundations but add much illumination to the playing, making this a release which, for all its flaws, is still a valuable addition to the Widor discography. **Marc Rochester**

Mikhail Pletnev

JS Bach Suite, BWV818a Beethoven Piano Sonata No 6, Op 10 No 2 Chopin Piano Sonata No 3, Op 58. Nocturnes - No 4, Op 15 No 1; No 19, Op 72 No 1. Waltzes - No 4, Op 34 No 3; No 8, Op 64 No 3 D Scarlatti Keyboard Sonatas - Kk8; Kk17; 'La caccia', Kk96; Kk259

Mikhail Pletnev *pf*

Melodiya ② MELCD100 2581 (95' • ADD)
Recorded live at the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, October 31, 1979



Mikhail Pletnev was 21 when he won the Gold Medal at the 1978 Tchaikovsky Competition, and if there were any question marks over his worthiness at the time, they should surely have been erased by this recital from the following year. In fact, the only question that arises now is why it has taken so long for these thrilling performances to be released for the first time.

True, Pletnev might have been suspected of a degree of showing off in his choice of one of the most out-of-the-way of Bach's Suites as a vehicle for his scintillating fingerwork. The supercharged Menuet is certainly like nothing ever danced by humankind and the Gigue has a whiff of

GRAMOPHONE Focus

TCHAIKOVSKY FOR ONE

Jeremy Nicholas gets acquainted with Valentina Lisitsa's comprehensive survey of Tchaikovsky's solo piano music

Tchaikovsky

Complete Works for Solo Piano

Valentina Lisitsa *pf*

Decca 5 10 483 4417DX10 (11h 5' • DDD)



Valentina Lisitsa is bold, fearless and forthright to just the right degree in the early works, keen to relish every opportunity Tchaikovsky offers to rack up the tension. We seem set fair for a convincing and idiomatic survey of the solo works ... until, oh dear, we hit the buffers on track 6 – the rarely played *Valse-caprice*, Op 4. What we get is a deconstruction of the piece played at practice speed, lasting an interminable 13'31". Both Viktoria Postnikova (8'47") and Michael Ponti (5'33", with the repeat of the first section omitted),

in their complete Tchaikovsky sets, present the true spirit of the piece.

Working one's way through all 10 discs, you realise with mounting disappointment that this mannerism is something like a default position with Lisitsa when it comes to reflective, technically undemanding works. Indeed, I recall a recital in Cremona a few years ago when she eked out the last pages of a sequence of Chopin Nocturnes with extended rallentandos to the same somnolent effect. Here, for example, are the 12 *Morceaux*, Op 40, an archetypical Tchaikovsky mixture of inspired and insipid short works. It begins with the brief 'Étude', a veritable whirlwind that Lisitsa storms through with thrilling velocity and a marvellous *leggiero* touch. Immediately after that comes the lovely (and well-known) 'Chanson triste'. Tchaikovsky marks this *Allegro non troppo* (not Lisitsa's *moderato*) and requests that

la melodia be played *con molto espressione* – which means a degree of rubato, yes, but not a tenuto on the first beat of every bar, dragging down the pulse and bringing a stop-go momentum to proceedings.

Again, the tempo Lisitsa adopts for No 9 (another salon favourite) is hardly *Tempo di valse*, its airy grace replaced by a heavy tread, the left-hand melody of its central section dominated by the secondary material in the right hand.

Whenever there is a piece or part of a piece that demands fleet fingers and incisive rhythm – the second sections of 'Au village' (No 7), say, and 'Danse russe' (No 10) – then Lisitsa is bang on the money; whenever the mood is retrospective or reflective, she becomes a vivisectionist, unpicking these fragile miniatures so that the structure collapses. Try No 12, 'Rêverie interrompue', which drifts home at 6'08" compared with Posnikova's 4'29", a faster reading that, ironically, projects a dreamlike reverie far more vividly. The last track on this CD (disc 6) is *Dumka*, Op 59, which illustrates to perfection Lisitsa's Jekyll-and-Hyde approach.

It is one that is also in evidence on disc 4, which is devoted to *The Seasons*. Much (in fact, most) of the playing here is quite lovely but, just when you are thinking

GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

Valentina Lisitsa

What attracted you to Tchaikovsky's piano music?

Before I dived head-first into the immense sea of music Tchaikovsky left us, his piano works were sort of an enigma for me. It's like, you do know they exist, but the world is so full of exciting things – like Liszt and Chopin – that make it easy for you as a young aspiring virtuoso to get your audience to jump to their feet. Although Tchaikovsky's piano works are often hugely challenging in terms of virtuosity, the technical difficulties are not always completely noticeable; they are merely a tool for achieving something bigger.

There is enough genius in Tchaikovsky's piano music to satisfy the most sophisticated and the most novice audience. More importantly, his piano music (just like his music in general) has a truly universal appeal; it's unmistakably Russian but never parochial. His music, like his persona, is genuinely kind, and kindness is what we need so badly nowadays. I see a great demand, or rather thirst, expressly for this kind of music.



It's quite an undertaking. How did the project take shape?

We started discussing this idea a couple of years ago. When the final decision was made and the approximate date of the release set, I was left with barely four months between other commitments to learn and record the complete Tchaikovsky. Weekly flights ensued to Vienna's suburbs, where Bösendorfer kindly let us use their factory's piano testing facility as a makeshift recording studio, complete with the on-call piano technician and 10 or so specimens of their newest flagship model.

I would sight-read and dissect difficult passages at sound-checks before scheduled recitals (you can't imagine how many times in those four months I had to assure the concert promoters – 'no, no, it is *not* what I am playing tonight!'), and practise on random upright pianos in Airbnb flats between concerts, in order not to waste hours flying home. It was a very difficult period, very stressful, very intense – but worth every moment.

Tchaikovsky's piano music is largely overshadowed by his orchestral music and operas – should it be better known?

I would call the situation 'an embarrassment of riches'. If Tchaikovsky had written only his solo piano music and nothing else of significance, he would be ranked alongside Schumann. There is more than enough proof on these 10 CDs to justify such a claim. Yet the piano music is overshadowed by his other works: there are few composers who can compete with Tchaikovsky in terms of sheer output and in the number of recognisable tunes that have entered our musical DNA. Mozart, perhaps.

I wish, too, that we would all promote the music of Tchaikovsky beyond the same few works that are heard time and again.

that this is an account to set beside the best, you sit becalmed in a gondola, with the 'Barcarolle' (June) extended to over six minutes. Mikhail Pletnev, who himself is in no hurry to come home, gets to the heart of the matter in 4'36" (Virgin/Erato, 12/94).

So then what do you do when you are presented on disc 3 with both the sonatas (the *Grand Sonata*, Op 37, followed by the early Sonata in C sharp minor published posthumously) in two of the finest performances I have come across? Lisitsa swallows them whole, with playing of immense power and conviction, allowing herself plenty of time to dream when required without ever slipping into her unsustainable practice-tempo mode. With her incisive attack and steely articulation, this is piano-playing of great character and individuality. If you have stayed clear of Tchaikovsky's sonatas, these may be the performances that tempt you to investigate.

Elsewhere are Tchaikovsky's other collections of short works (Opp 19, 39, 51 and 72), works without opus numbers, and the *Fifty Russian Folk Songs* arranged for four hands (Lisitsa is joined in these by Alexei Kuznetsoff). Discs 9 and 10 are devoted to Tchaikovsky's own piano arrangements of his orchestral works including the complete *Nutcracker*, *Potpourri on Themes from 'The Voyevoda'*, the *Festival Coronation March* (a dreadful piece in any form), and the 1812 overture (a thankless task for any pianist). However, the transcription of *Marche slave* is extraordinary, an ingenious reworking for the keyboard and a stunning tour de force by Lisitsa. On its own it might just be enough to make you press that 'add to cart' button.

I might say that the piano, a Bösendorfer, has been very well recorded, even if Lisitsa can sometimes produce a somewhat hectoring, brittle tone at *fortissimo* and above. The presentation of the 10 discs and the booklet are first-class. In conclusion, Lisitsa offers the most comprehensive Tchaikovsky *intégrale* on the market but I shall not be replacing my much-played Ponti LPs or, on balance, Postnikova's seven CDs. I can do without *The Nutcracker* and the 1812 on the piano – and, ultimately, without the series of eccentric musical decisions that mar Lisitsa's set. **G**

Selected comparisons:

Ponti (3/74^R) (DOCU) 231556

Postnikova (6/92^R, 7/93^R) (ERAT) 9029 57377-4

victor ludorum exhibitionism. But then there are the enthralling flexibility and sensitivity to line he brings to the Allemande and Sarabande, neither of which strays outside the boundaries of stylishness. What sounds like slightly muted applause perhaps indicates some mixed feelings in the Moscow Conservatory cognoscenti.

If the audience hadn't already registered what a special artist they had before them, they must surely have done so with the four Scarlatti sonatas. Not only are the repeated notes of machine-gun-like precision, not only are expressive corners turned with ultra-winsome refinement, but there is some hair-raisingly imaginative pedalling, some precision-tooled ornamentation and in places some delectable humour in the sudden application of brakes. Pletnev re-recorded all four sonatas in 1995, in an acclaimed two-disc set for Virgin Classics (now Erato, 3/96). There he moderated some of the more extreme tempos – though only slightly – and benefited from a more spacious recording. But as an authentic document of a young artist exalting in his powers before one of the world's most discerning and demanding audiences, the Moscow versions come with a greater frisson, for me at least.

Then there is Beethoven's early F major Sonata in an irresistibly fleet-footed and witty performance, with an ultra-*Presto* finale, for which the only comparison that springs to mind is Glenn Gould: in this instance, an unqualified compliment.

Could it be the occasional mis-hits in the Chopin Sonata, in particular the momentary derailments in the mounting excitement towards the end of the finale, that led to doubts over its release? If so, what a pity, because this is a performance of utterly compelling individuality, poetry and risk-taking. Wilful in places? Maybe for some, but not for me. Such command, allied to such abandon – breathtaking stuff. By the way, if technical perfection matters, there's always Pletnev's 1997 account (DG, 12/97); but it's curious how many of the same inflections sound mannered and overly calculated under studio conditions.

Every one of the four smaller Chopin pieces is a gem. The F major Nocturne hangs in the air with delicious languor; the A flat Waltz is thoroughly charming and finally disappears in a magical waft of pedal; the F major Waltz is daringly skittish; and who would have thought that the E minor Nocturne could be so delicately and delectably spun as this?

The recording is very close-up indeed, and it is a shame that applause has been so severely edited down. At 95 minutes, it may also strike you as rather short measure for

two CDs. But for me none of that weighs a jot against the exhilarating sense of a young master-pianist captured in full majestic flight. **David Fanning**

'An die ferne Geliebte'

Beethoven *An die ferne Geliebte*, Op 98

(transcr Liszt, S469) **Kreisler** Liebesfreud.

Liebesleid (both transcr Rachmaninov)

Schumann Études symphoniques, Op 13

Wagner Isoldens Liebestod (transcr Liszt, S447)

Alexander Krichel *pf*

Sony Classical 19075 87895-2 (69' • DDD)



Since Alexander Krichel's remarkable 2011 debut recording, with its compelling Liszt B minor Ballade and selections from the second *Année* (Telos/Profil), the Hamburg native has calmly pursued his own path. There was his orchestral debut, coupling less familiar Chopin and Hummel with Mozart's K414 (Sony, 4/15); a stylish disc of Ravel (5/17); a Rachmaninov Second Concerto plus solo pieces; and works of Schumann, Hensel, Mendelssohn, and Weber alongside Schubert-Liszt. His new Sony release, captured in astonishingly luxurious, lifelike sound, is an even more disparate potpourri, original and thoughtful as ever.

Individual tastes in Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes* vary widely (my personal favourite is Grainger's 1928 recording), but Krichel's dreamy account is sure to win adherents. He invests considerable affective portent in the posthumous variations, placing them as a sequence between Variations 6 and 7, so that momentum builds towards the finale.

Rachmaninov's overstuffed transcriptions of his friend Fritz Kreisler's *Liebesleid* and *Liebesfreud* threaten to swamp the charming originals. Undaunted, Krichel plays them for all their worth, savouring their fragrance and lilt. The change of milieu from the Russian-inflected Viennese ballroom to the exalted realms of the Liebestod at first seems abrupt. But Krichel brings such earnestness and wonder to the rapture of Wagner's heroine that we can't help but succumb to his absorption.

If I were to have a reservation, it would surround *An die ferne Geliebte*, where Krichel may be overly self-effacing. A more vivid characterisation might enhance the overall effect without damage to the original. But that is but a quibble beside these imaginative performances on a beautifully realised and pleasurable recording. **Patrick Rucker**

William Bolcom

Throughout a decades-long career Bolcom has continued to explore what American music is, writes Jonathan Shipley

It was the English painter and poet William Blake who stated, 'The difference between a bad artist and a good one is: the bad artist seems to copy a great deal; the good one really does.' American composer William Bolcom is a good one. For much of his career (he started composing as a pre-teen) he has been drawn to the musical culture of America. He asks, what *is* American music? What *was* it? And can it be both at the same time? The answer, if one looks at Bolcom's prolific catalogue, is yes. A thousand times yes.

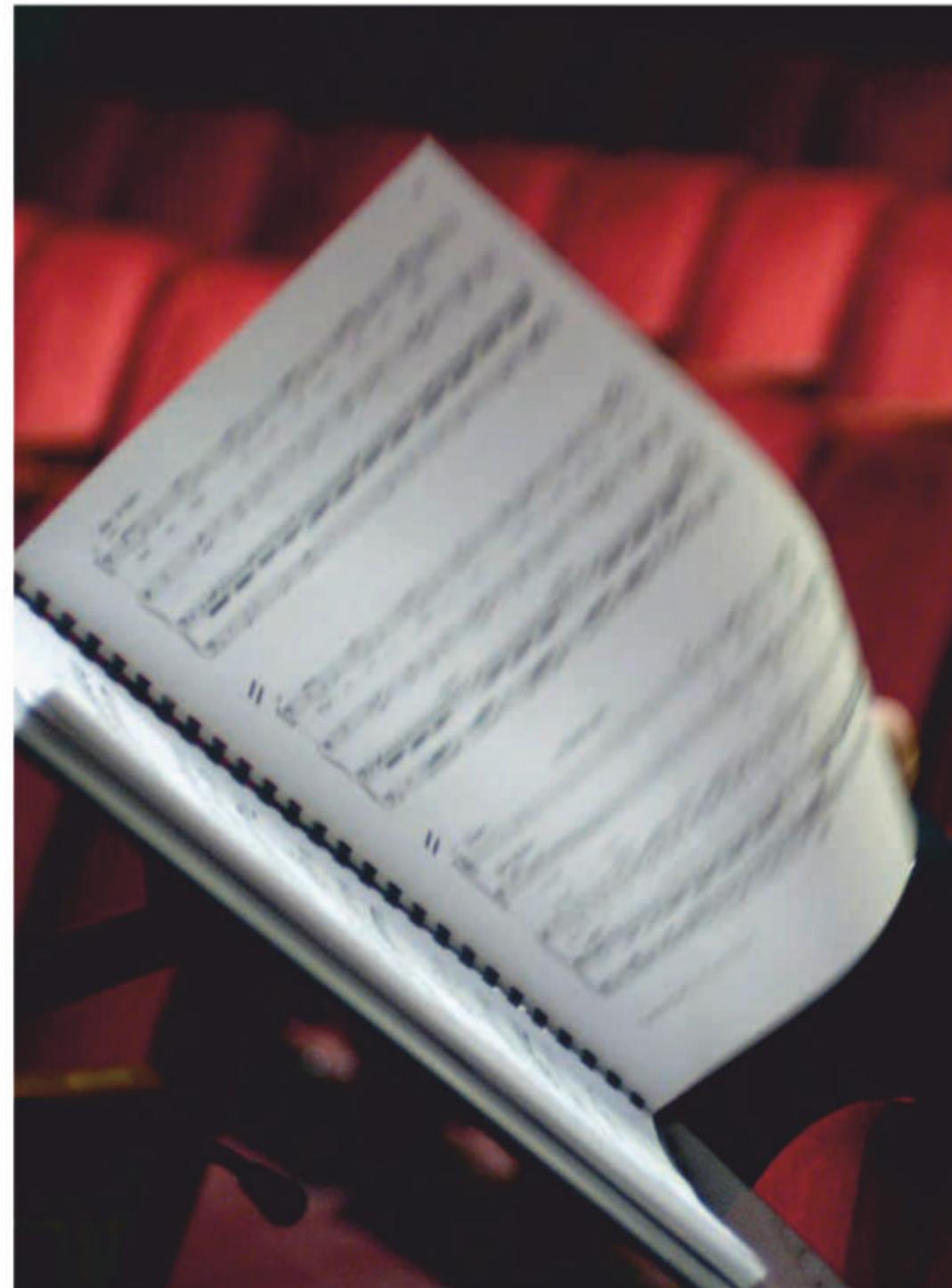
He has written works hearkening back to the famous singer-songwriters of old – Irving Berlin, Ira Gershwin and the like. He's written new pieces in the ragtime vein. He continues to be drawn to combining popular culture with high culture. And why not? The idiosyncratic composer Ives, who worked in insurance as he wrote trailblazing music, made a deep impression on Bolcom. As he tells me in a recent interview, 'Ives's attitude brings things together and people together, which is what I've striven for.' Bolcom brought together 18th-century England and 20th-century America in what some would argue is his masterwork, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1956-81), a piece based on Blake's poetry (an illustrated collection of 45 poems published in 1794) and incorporating many American musical styles throughout, from bluegrass to vaudeville; rock musical to reggae.

To try to categorise his music is a fool's errand. There are so many different musical styles, it's hard to keep up

Bolcom tells me, 'I keep hoping that music, maybe some I've created, will release enough health into the world to counteract the ugliness so prevalent right now.' Currently, Bolcom is working on a piece for organ to celebrate a new instrument in the Marcel Breuer chapel at St John's Abbey Church, Collegeville, Minnesota.

Blake wrote, 'The man who never in his mind and thoughts travel'd to heaven is no artist.' Bolcom (an artist) was born in 1938 in Seattle, Washington, and began composition studies at the age of 11 with George Frederick McKay and John Verrall at the University of Washington as well as having piano lessons with Berthe Poncy Jacobson. He later went to California, studying under Milhaud at Mills College, Oakland, and under Leland Smith at Stanford University; at the Paris Conservatoire he studied with Messiaen.

Though inspired by the French early in his career, his music is stamped 'USA' through and through. Take, for instance, his



oft-played *Graceful Ghost Rag* (1970). It is an elegant elegy to some bygone time. It is a slow look over one's shoulder, all the while propelling steadily and assuredly forwards. Dark honey seemingly drips off the piano player's fingers. It is a piece that feels something like twilight – a musical melancholia.

Butterflies, hummingbirds is a piece from his Pulitzer Prize-winning set *12 New Etudes* (1977-86) for piano. It sounds like what you might imagine – a flight of fancy. It is a whirring and colourful thing, notes racing up and down, trembling in one register before darting into another. It is jewelled and ephemeral, much like

nostalgia – something that Americans are keen on feeling.

The Serpent's Kiss (from the four-piece suite *The Garden of Eden*, 1969; originally for solo piano, then arranged by the composer for two pianos) is fevered and furious. It's

BOLCOM FACTS

Born May 26, 1938, in Seattle, Washington, USA

Studied University of Washington (BA, 1955-58); Mills College, Oakland, California (MA, 1958-59); Stanford University (DMA, 1961-64); Paris Conservatoire (1959-61; 1965-66, 2nd prize)

Awards Pulitzer Prize (1988); Grammy (2005); National Medal of Arts (2006); Musical America's Composer of the Year (2007)

Collaborator Wife Joan Morris, a mezzo-soprano, has recorded more than two dozen albums with Bolcom, most focusing on popular songs from the early 20th century, including George and Ira Gershwin, Yip Harburg and Rodgers and Hart



a breakneck charge into ragtime, as if Scott Joplin were playing an upright in the dining car of a train whose brakes have failed.

To try to categorise Bolcom is a fool's errand. Yes, his work continues to look back at the music that defines America, but he does it in so many different musical styles, it's hard to keep track. He's exceedingly prolific and he's been at it for around 70 years. For instance, he's made more than 25 albums with his wife and musical collaborator mezzo-soprano Joan Morris. Many of those albums focus on cabaret songs, show tunes, and American popular songs from the early 20th century. He's also written violin sonatas, symphonies, operas, film scores, theatre pieces, string quartets and other chamber works, and choral and vocal pieces. He also taught at the University of Michigan School of Music for 35 years, retiring from that position in 2008. When I asked him what currently is of interest to him, 'The next piece' was his response. When I asked him to look back on the work he's already created, it was: 'I'm too busy to judge.'

From the album 'Cabaret Songs (Complete)', released in 2004 with his other longtime collaborator, lyricist Arnold Weinstein (1927-2005), is the song 'Amor'. Sung by Morris, it begins: 'It wasn't the policeman's fault in all that traffic roar / Instead of shouting halt when he saw me he shouted "Amor".' There is, in many of Bolcom's works, a sense of humour, a jauntiness, a wink. That's no less evident in his 1980 piece 'Lime Jello Marshmallow Cottage Cheese Surprise', written for voice and piano. It is based on his experiences in

his youth, playing the piano for women's clubs and being fed the oddest of foods.

Whether it's an opera, like *A View from the Bridge* (1997-99), based on a work by Arthur Miller, or *A Whitman Triptych* (1995), a work for voice and orchestra based on the poetry of Walt Whitman, Bolcom is always at music's loom, weaving America's musical tapestry. 'America is much alike in many ways wherever you are in it,' he states; 'in its attitude, particularly, though the accents differ.' Bolcom has made a career on accents. Take his setting of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, where, unfettered, he uses a melange of musical styles throughout. It took him 25 years to complete and it is as wide-ranging, and deeply American, as any piece can be. If Bolcom's entire career could be distilled into one piece, this would be that piece. He says, 'William Blake is central to my musical and spiritual psyche.'

The piece won the 2005 Grammys for Best Classical Album, Best Choral Performance and Best Classical Contemporary Composition. It is an eclectic work that showcases different voices in different styles. There is no 'one American'; there is no 'one America': it is told through the voices of many. 'The Tyger' sounds like another runaway train; 'The Shepherd' has a country and western feel; 'The Little Black Boy' feels like the blues. The piece is big, with about 450 musicians performing on the recording, including University of Michigan choirs and ensembles, and vocal and instrumental soloists from the classical, pop, folk, country and operatic realms (recorded live in April 2004; Naxos American Classics, 7/05).

Bolcom has no thoughts of slowing down. As well as the organ piece, he is working on a new piano concerto. 'I've just wanted to write what I wanted to hear, and if others listen, I'm delighted.' And what he's heard, and continues to hear, is America reverberating in a concert hall and through time itself. It was Blake who said, 'Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And eternity in an hour.' In Bolcom's hands are a blank sheet of paper and thoughts of what's next.

BOLCOM ON RECORD

Merely a taste of the composer's huge and eclectic output

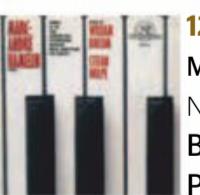


'After the Ball - plus Highlights from Vaudeville'

Joan Morris *mez* William Bolcom *pf*

Nonesuch

This is an extended reissue of the 1974 Grammy-nominated album 'After the Ball - A Treasury of Turn-of-the-Century Popular Songs' on which Morris and Bolcom perform such songs as 'Waltz Me around Again Willie', 'Under the Bamboo Tree' and 'I Don't Want to Play in Your Yard'.



12 New Etudes

Marc-André Hamelin *pf*

New World

Broken into four books of three pieces, the Pulitzer Prize-winning work showcases Bolcom's dynamism with older musical styles like ragtime.



A View from the Bridge

Timothy Nolen *bar* Ronald Watkins *sngr* et al; Chicago Lyric Opera Chorus and Orchestra / Dennis Russell Davies

New World (10/01)

The world-premiere recording of Bolcom's second opera commission by the Lyric Opera of Chicago (after his first opera, *McTeague*, 1991-92) can be frantic, cacophonous, sharp, taut and roaring, with hints of Ives and Bernstein.

Vocal



Edward Breen enjoys an Easter offering from John Eliot Gardiner: 'The Gesualdo has a highly sculpted and overtly madrigalian immediacy as Gardiner draws out every dramatic fibre' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**



Hugo Shirley on a bold album from Claire Booth and Susan Bickley: 'Booth throws herself fully into Debussy's heady world, her voice breathy and open and often indecently sensuous' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 87**

JS Bach

Cantatas - No 82, Ich habe genug; No 169, Gott soll allein mein Herze haben. Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr - BWV662; BWV663; BWV664. Prelude and Fugue, BWV543
Céline Scheen sop **Nicholas Scott** ten
Benoît Arnould bass **Maude Gratton** org
Le Banquet Céleste / Damien Guillon counterten
Alpha © ALPHA448 (74' • DDD • T/t)

JS Bach

Cantatas - No 17, Wer Dank opfert, der preiset mich; No 33, Allein zu Dir, Herr Jesu Christ; No 99, Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan
Julia Sophie Wagner sop **Stefan Kahle** counterten
Wolfram Lattke ten **Tobias Berndt** bass
St Thomas's Choir, Leipzig; Saxon Baroque Orchestra / Gotthold Schwarz
Accentus © ACC30471 (55' • DDD • T)



The sublime lullaby 'Schlummert ein', surely the most searching and sensuous meditation on the favourite Pietist metaphor of death-as-sleep, has long made *Ich habe genug*, No 82, one of Bach's most popular cantatas. By my reckoning it is also the most recorded, with performances embracing virtually every voice type (Bach left versions for bass, soprano and alto) and stylistic perspective. With refined phrasing and a sweet, flutey upper register reminiscent of Alfred Deller, the French countertenor Damien Guillon has rightly made his reputation as a Bachian. Yet I found something wanting in his performances of both No 82 and the comparably moving No 169 for alto and obbligato organ.

Among countertenors to have tackled *Ich habe genug*, both Andreas Scholl (Decca, 4/12) and Iestyn Davies (Hyperion, 1/17) bring more colouristic range (including more resonant low notes) and a deeper engagement with the text. Taken dangerously slowly, at what sounds

like eight beats to the bar (an impression enhanced by the even stressing of the bass line), 'Schlummert ein' is smoothly, affectingly sung by Guillon. Yet there is minimal variety of expression and dynamics. I sense no change of tone, for instance, between the slumbrous refrain and what should be the more urgently incisive episodes.

A largely unshaped bass line also compromises the two arias with organ in No 169. Guillon, singing with greater expressive intensity than in No 82, and organist Maude Gratton combine eloquently in the bittersweet 'Stirb in mir'. Yet with monotonous stressing of the recurrent two-note bass figure, the rhythms trudge, devoid of the siciliano lilt caught by Gardiner in his recording with Natalie Stutzmann (SDG, 11/09). Gratton's understanding of Bachian rhetoric and ear-catching choice of registrations make for enjoyable listening in three chorale preludes and the A minor Prelude and Fugue, with a piquant (if initially unnerving) clash of tuning between fundamental and mutation stop in BWV662.

The Trinity season in the Lutheran calendar is traditionally a time of dire admonitions and general penitential gloom. Bach, though, livened things up in the dancing opening choruses of three relatively little-known cantatas, Nos 17, 33 and 99, included on a new disc from the Thomanerchor, recorded in the ultra-resonant acoustic of Leipzig's Lutherkirche. Topped by a fresh-toned treble line, the choir of Bach's own church are in fine shape under Thomaskantor Gotthold Schwarz, and the Sächsische Barockorchester play with style and gusto. It was criminal of Accentus not to name the superb flautist in No 99's frolicking obbligatos.

When Bach is in extrovert *Brandenburg* mode (concerto influence is rife throughout these cantatas), the vigour and directness of these performances are often exhilarating. Reservations creep in with some less-than-distinctive solo singing, reinforced by comparisons with recordings from

Gardiner (SDG) and Suzuki (BIS). In the faltering, sin-drenched alto aria in No 33, countertenor Stefan Kahle sounds pallid alongside Suzuki's Robin Blaze and Gardiner's grave-toned Natalie Stutzmann; and the pleasant but 'churchy' tenor Wolfram Lattke is no match for Gardiner's James Gilchrist in either lyrical warmth or dramatic intensity. Schwarz, dubiously, opts for massed trebles in the aria 'Herr, deine Güte reicht so weit' in No 17, a lively triple concerto for two violins and soprano. The Thomanerchor boys cope well enough, though inevitably the effect is slightly depersonalising. This new recording has its obvious attractions. But in all three cantatas, I'd still choose the colour and rhetorical subtlety of Gardiner and his responsive forces, seasoned Bachians all. **Richard Wigmore**

JS Bach

St John Passion, BWV245
Alexei Martynov ten Evangelist **Anatoly Safiulin** bass **Christus Lyudmila Belobragina** sop **Nina Romanova** mez **Yuri Semyonov** org **Boys' Choir of the Moscow State Choral School; Leningrad Chamber Orchestra of Old and Modern Music / Eduard Serov**

Melodiya © MELCD100 2379 (130' • ADD)
Broadcast performance, November 15, 1981



A Soviet decree in 1928 forbade performances of Bach's Passions by the State Academic Cappella more than twice a year, 'and not on any day coinciding with the church calendar'. Kurt Sanderling conducted the *St John* in Leningrad in 1954, and Karl Richter took it to Moscow in 1968 (on Easter Tuesday!), a performance once available on LP. So too was this concert from 1981, which betrays the lack of a performing tradition in several ways that make it an absorbing record of more than documentary value for Bach scholars and curious-minded listeners alike.



Soprano Martina Janková and baritone Tomáš Král bring warmth and poignancy to songs by Martinů – see review on page 81

It's evident from the Archiv LPs that Richter also brought a German-style organ with him on tour, whereas Yuri Semyonov is playing the magnificent instrument that Cavaillé-Coll designed and built for the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory as one of his last projects. At a shade over 12 minutes, the tempo of the opening chorus is nearly identical in both accounts, but Eduard Serov quite avoids Richter's suffocatingly dense textures and relentlessly bass-driven intensity. He evokes instead a sound world more familiar to European listeners from native performances of the *Sacred Concertos* by Bortnyansky, which is lent a further halo of historical distance by the artificial echo added (whether to the original recording or this new remastering I couldn't say) to the already considerable resonance of the Great Hall itself.

Unsupported by strings, Semyonov gets lost more than once during the recitatives, which are the least repeatable feature of the performance, Romantically delivered and at speeds that would make a nonsense of the German text were more of it distinct. Some minor editorial divergences in the vocal parts, the absence of solo spots from the chorus (covered between them by the Evangelist and the bass singing Pilate), the

replacement of viola da gamba with a cello for 'Es ist vollbracht': it's easy enough – and perhaps useful all the same – to enumerate a few ways in which Serov and his performers fall short of modern, best practice.

And yet this Passion tells its story with tremendous inner conviction. Best of the soloists is Lyudmila Belobragina, who makes her brief but telling contributions memorable with unselfconscious ornamentation, a lively sense of the text and a finely spun soprano. More distinctive still is the meticulously prepared work of the all-male Moscow State Choral School, whose boys combine the forcefully projected chest tone of the German treble school with the silvery top of English cathedral choirs. All the chorales are sensitively moulded but the best is saved for last, in a sublime account of 'Ach Herr, lass dein lieb Engelein' that gives Cavaillé-Coll's beast its head to stirring effect.

Peter Quantrill

Berlioz

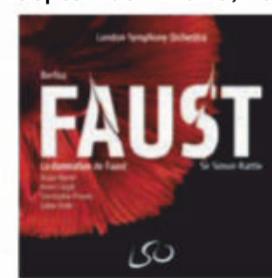
La damnation de Faust, Op 24

Karen Cargill mez **Bryan Hymel** ten **Christopher Purves** bar **Gábor Bretz** bass **Tiffin Choirs; Guildhall School Singers; London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle**

LSO Live ② LSO0809

(126' • DDD/DSD • S/T/t)

Recorded live at the Barbican, London, September 17 & 19, 2017

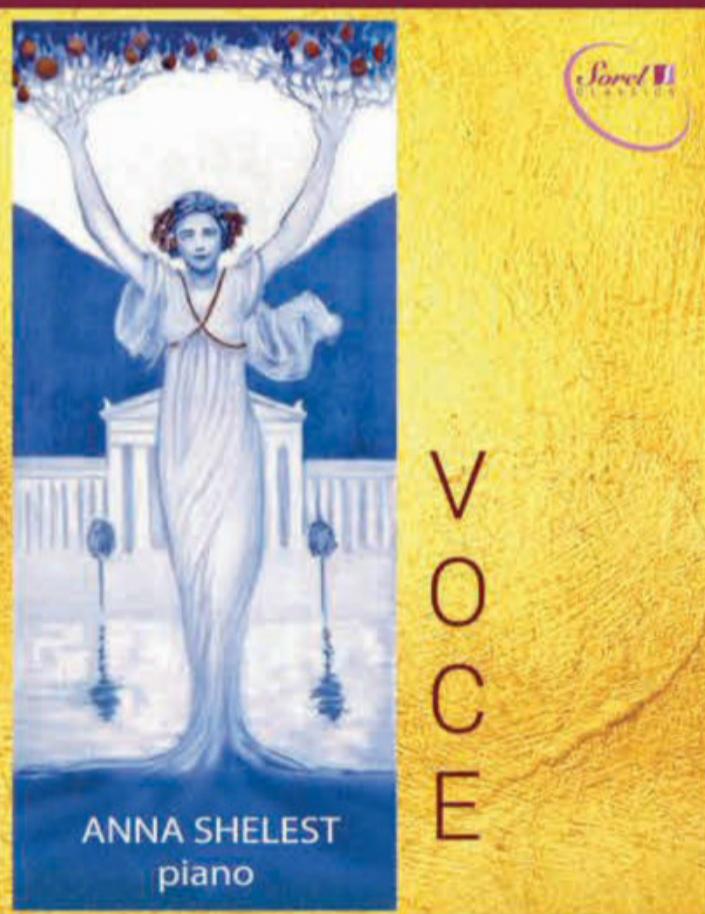


If a single achievement symbolises the British 'lead' in performing

Berlioz over the composer's homeland, it could well be the LSO's legacy with this score. Here is their fourth official recording, of which one in particular (the first Colin Davis of the early 1970s) must stand at or near the top of anyone's favoured discography. Simon Rattle made *La damnation* one of the first pieces he worked on (in September 2017) at the start of his music directorship of the orchestra. Berlioz's generous orchestration, solo line-up and choruses (adult and junior) both on- and offstage reminds one of what a suitable 'test' piece it is for the launch of a conductor/ensemble partnership.

To say it immediately, it is a test that the new line-up passes with flying colours. Of course these are not the players who appeared under Pierre Monteux in 1962, or (one assumes) mostly under Colin Davis in

Expanding opportunities for women in music



DONNA VOCE

ANNA SHELEST, piano

FANNY MENDELSSOHN Sonata in G Minor
AMY BEACH Ballade Op. 6; Four Sketches Op. 15
CLARA SCHUMANN Scherzo Op. 14
CÉCILE CHAMINADE Les Sylvains Op. 60
Concert Etudes Op. 35
LILI BOULANGER Prelude in D Flat
CHIAYU HSU Rhapsody Toccata

ANTON RUBINSTEIN

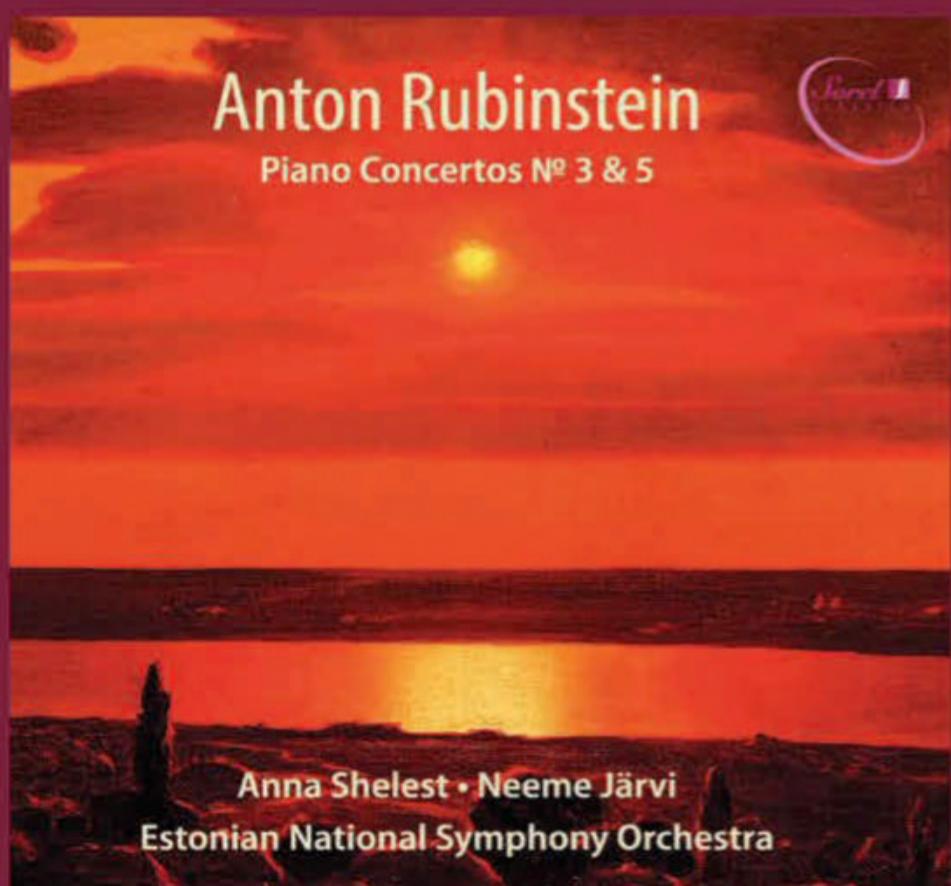
Piano Concerto No. 3 in G Major, Op. 45
Piano Concerto No. 5 in E Flat Major, Op. 94

ANNA SHELEST, piano
NEEME JÄRVI, conductor
ESTONIAN NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The second release in a series of recordings featuring Anton Rubinstein's works for piano and orchestra with Neeme Järvi and Anna Shelest.



SERGEI PROKOFIEV
Complete Piano Sonatas
NATALIA TRULL, piano.
Re-issue of the notable 1995 recording.





1973, but the work and its style – especially the virtuosity and panache required – have clearly remained in the orchestra's collective memory. There is impressive and fluent instrumental work here, nowhere more so than in tricky rhythmic passages for strings and brass.

There is also a natural sense of when the orchestra is on display – in the lead, as it were – and when it is playing the role of accompanist. Berlioz called the score 'an opera without décor or costumes' and, as with his *Roméo et Juliette*, one of its biggest challenges is in keeping the action behind the music, the dramatic line, clear. Rattle, of course, is a strong guide here, although one might (with perhaps unfair memories of the 'soundtrack' from two memorable ENO stagings of the piece – David Alden's conducted by Mark Elder and Terry Gilliam's by Edward Gardner) hanker for even more militaristic swagger in the famous Rákóczi March and more stress in the Part 4 Ride to the Abyss. But overall it's a tightly organised and carefully paced achievement from the conductor. The soloists and chorus match his lead well. There's drama without overdoing it on the platform and, as the live stream – still available on YouTube – confirms, the acting was all in the voices (and faces).

There's no lack of either angst or love in Bryan Hymel's emotional and stylish reading of the title-part and a special richness about Karen Cargill's fantasies as Marguerite. Christopher Purves manages both wit and a specially sleazy nastiness as the victorious Devil and Gábor Bretz is strong and straightforward as Brander. The choirs have worked hard under their directors and are a notch up in both language and expression on their London predecessors.

So definitely recommended. But the competition remains fierce. There's a special atmosphere of fresh discovery (and a strong cast led by Nicolai Gedda and Jules Bastin) in Davis Mk 1. Both the old Markevitch records with francophone orchestras have terrific punch; the Gardiner, also with a French orchestra, has a big colour range (almost a 'period' recording) and Munch's not always note-perfect version, France via Boston but without surplus German weight, always feels right. **Mike Ashman**

Selected comparisons:

Boston SO, Munch (12/55^R) (RCA)

88875 16979-2 or 19075 93879-2

LSO, C Davis (1/74^R) (PHIL) 416 395-2PH2

Lamoureux Orch, Markevitch (10/03) (DG)

463 673-2GOR2 or 483 6377

Lyon Op Orch, Gardiner (3/90) (PHIL) 426 199-2PH2

RTF Orch, Markevitch (ANDR) ANDRCD9063

Cavalli

'Missa 1660'

Grande Messe vénitienne pour la paix

franco-espagnole de Louis XIV

Galilei Consort / Benjamin Chénier

Château de Versailles Spectacles (CVS006

(69' • DDD • T/t)



To celebrate the Treaty of the Pyrenees between France and Spain, and to mark the consequent wedding of the young Louis XIV to the Infanta Maria Theresia, Cardinal Mazarin commissioned an opera from Cavalli. *Ercole amante* was eventually performed in Paris in 1662, by which time the cardinal was dead and the queen was pregnant. (It is to be revived at the Opéra Comique next November by Pygmalion under Raphaël Pichon.) But earlier, on January 25, 1660, the French ambassador in Venice had arranged for a Te Deum and a Mass to be sung at the church of SS Giovanni e Paolo; and it is presumed that it was this setting by Cavalli that was performed. Better known as the *Messa concertata*, it had been published in the collection *Musiche sacre* in 1656.

The Mass is laid out on an expansive scale, scored for double choir and soloists, two violins and violoncino, and other instruments ad lib. On this recording it is punctuated by two motets, for two and three voices respectively, and some anonymous – improvised? – doodling on the organ. I don't know why it should include *Lauda Jerusalem*, one of the psalms for Vespers, but it makes for a suitably joyful conclusion.

There is much antiphonal writing, as you would expect, and much in the way of sonorous but empty grandeur. Passages like the surprising chromatic cadence at 'miserere nobis' in the *Gloria* are all too rare. Here and there are reminders that Cavalli was above all a composer of opera. And there's the rub. The report from the French ambassador to Mazarin (quoted in the poorly translated booklet note) refers to the choir's inclusion of famous musicians who had come to sing in the operas during the Carnival. Some operatic extravagance would be welcome here, the male alto soloists being particularly reticent. Moreover, with a choir of only eight voices balancing the eight soloists, the element of contrast is pretty well absent. The cornetts and trombones sound splendid, though, and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Of those parts, the motet *O bone Jesu* for unnamed soprano and alto is particularly well worth hearing. **Richard Lawrence**

Dufay

'Lament for Constantinople'

Belle, que vous ay je mesfait? Ce moys de may.

La dolce vista. En triumphant de Cruel Dueil.

Helas, et quant vous veray?. Je me complains. Je

ne suy plus tel que souloye. Je vous pri/Ma tres

douce amie!/Tant que mon argent dura. Je vueil

chanter de cuer joyeux. Ma belle dame, je vous

pri. Malheureux cuer. Mon chier amy. O tres

piteulx/Omnes amici (Lamentatio sancte matris

ecclesie Constantinopolitane). Par le regard de

vos beaux yeux. Pouray je avoir vostre mercy?.

Puisque vous estez campieur. Le serviteur.

Vostre bruit et vostre grant fame

The Orlando Consort

Hyperion (CDA68236 (71' • DDD • T/t)



This isn't the first recording of Dufay's chansons to appear since the Medieval Ensemble of London's complete survey nearly 40 years ago (L'Oiseau-Lyre, 12/81), but it's the most rounded and satisfying view of him to be had from a single anthology (in that Cantica Symphonia's 2006 Glossa survey focused on the early songs). I was happy to be reacquainted with a few personal favourites (the early ballade *Mon chier amy*, the late virelai *Malheureux cuer* and rondeau *Vostre bruit* and the cheeky drinking-song *Puisque vous estez campieur*), but having listened several times through I'm struck by several that had not quite done so before, which now speak very eloquently: *Pouray je avoir, Belle, que vous ay je mesfait?* and the understatedly perfect *Par le regard*. Like so many of the individual songs, the recital grows in stature with repeated listening.

The reason is that the Orlando's are so experienced in this repertory that, nearly always, the choice of tempo and tone is spot-on (and tempo is perhaps the most important decision, given that absolute tempos are never indicated), which maximises the music's communicative potential and more than compensates for the occasional vocal blemish (that this is fiendishly exposed singing cannot be overstated). The programme takes a while to get going: the choice of *O tres piteulx* as an opener is curiously muted and downbeat, and thereafter *En triumphant de Cruel Dueil*, which seems to me a touch slow given the voices involved. I imagine some may find the Orlando's overall approach corseted and overly cautious, as though hearing Dufay through the prism of their recent Machaut recordings. I can understand this, but in singing of such insight there is so much to learn.

And as to the music – did I mention it earlier? – Dufay is simply astonishing.

Fabrice Fitch

Duruflé

'Complete Choral Works'

Messe Cum jubilo, Op 11. Quatre Motets

sur des thèmes grégoriens, Op 10.

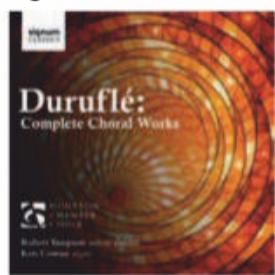
Notre Père. Requiem, Op 9

Cecilia Duarte sop **Eduardo Tercero** bar

Houston Chamber Choir / Robert Simpson

with **Norman Fischer** vc **Ken Cowan** org

Signum  SIGCD571 (69' • DDD)



There are just four extant choral works by Maurice Duruflé, which, by good

fortune, are easily accommodated on a single CD. Bearing in mind that every one is a supreme masterpiece and each is firmly embedded in the repertory of most leading choral groups, this latest recording of Duruflé's complete choral works faces some pretty stiff competition.

The unique selling point here is the highly polished, virtually flawless sound of the Houston Chamber Choir. Here is a group that clearly enjoys the art of choral singing and in Robert Simpson they have a director whose focus on producing a superbly homogeneous sound makes for warm, comfortable listening. Whether that's quite what Duruflé's music needs is another matter, and I suspect were the disc to be devoted to the music of Palestrina, Wesley, Pärt or Whitacre, it would all sound much the same as this.

Simpson certainly shows sensitivity towards the ebb and flow of Duruflé's long, chant-based lines, which gives a rich, seamless quality to the *Motets sur des thèmes grégoriens*. And while we can mostly sit back and luxuriate in the sumptuous choral tone for its own sake, the female voices produce a surprisingly supple and agile account of the second motet, 'Tota pulchra es'.

The Houston men seem strained at the start of the *Messe Cum jubilo* but Simpson has two aces up his sleeve. The first is the Panamanian baritone Eduardo Tercero, whose pure voice and open-eyed sincerity ideally complement his fine sense of balance between high drama and deep introspection. The second is organist Ken Cowan, who brings more than enough colour to compensate for the slightly monochrome sound of the choir.

Duruflé's Impressionistic tendencies have rarely been so powerfully evoked than here, as Cowan draws on a continually shifting palette of light and shade, subtle colours

and almost imperceptible shifts in tone. He certainly adds real distinction to this performance of the Requiem.

Nevertheless, this is a recording that will be of interest primarily to those who enjoy good choral singing. For perceptive interpretations of Duruflé's music, both Richard Marlow and James O'Donnell are more obvious choices. **Marc Rochester**

Selected comparisons:

Westminster Cath Ch, O'Donnell

(6/95) (HYPE) CDA66757

Ch of Trinity Coll, Cambridge, Marlow

(CHAN) CHAN10357

Handel

Judas Maccabaeus, HWV63

Deanna Breiwick sop **Sophie Harmsen** mez **Owen**

Willets counteren **Kenneth Tarver** ten **João**

Fernandes bass **NDR Choir; Göttingen Festival**

Orchestra / Laurence Cummings

Accent  ACC26410 (137' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at the Göttingen International

Handel Festival, May 10, 2018



Granted, *Judas Maccabaeus* is never likely to be a favourite in Scotland. But Handel's celebration of 'Butcher' Cumberland's victory over Bonnie Prince Charlie's forces at Culloden proved an instant hit in 1747, doing wonders for the composer's bank account; and its cannily calculated mix of bellicose swagger and pastoral grace made it a choral society favourite for two centuries. These days *Judas*, while not exactly neglected, is often viewed with critical suspicion and/or condescension. If you want Handelian subtlety and psychological depth, look elsewhere. Yet in a performance as committed as this, the oratorio can still hit sympathetic listeners 'on the drum of the ear' (Handel's own phrase).

Judas has not fared particularly well on disc. Best among a smattering of previous versions was the performance directed by Robert King, rooted in the Anglican choral tradition. King includes the numbers Handel added for later performances, among them 'See, the conqu'ring hero comes', filched from *Joshua*, and the ravishing duet and chorus 'Sion now her head shall raise', probably the last music Handel composed. Cummings, by contrast, performs the oratorio as it was premiered at Covent Garden in 1747, with a loss of some superb music but a gain in tautness. Where he and his expert Göttingen forces decisively score is in their vivid response to the music's elemental vigour, slightly

muted by King. Although the NDR Choir are slightly backwardly balanced, they sing with incisive attack and a wide dynamic range – grave eloquence, too, in the choral elegies in Part 1. The impetuous 'Disdainful of danger', here all nervous excitement, and the pugnacious opening chorus of Part 2, 'Fall'n is the foe', are much more dramatic than on the King recording. Cummings chooses apt, mobile tempos (though he gives plenty of space to the threnody 'Ah! Wretched Israel') and never lets the rhythms lapse into auto-plod.

All the characters in *Judas* are generic. Those with the most to sing – the Israelite Woman and the Israelite Man – are anonymous. Yet their arias and duets mine a vein of easy (it's tempting to add English) tunefulness that gives the score so much of its appeal. Both of Cummings's chosen singers make their mark. Deanna Breiwick, rather more vibrant than today's typical Handel soprano, sings with firm, bright tone and free-soaring top notes. Sophie Harmsen fields a warm, evenly produced mezzo and is impressively agile in 'So rapid thy course'. Crisper diction (consonants are often vague) would have made both their performances even better.

I didn't much care for the dull-toned, constricted bass in the role of Judas's brother Simon (Michael George, for King, is in a different class); and countertenor Owen Willets spoils an otherwise sensitively phrased 'Father of Heaven' with a seriously flat initial entry. But Kenneth Tarver, with an ideal blend of velvet and steel in the tone, outstrips all his rivals on disc, even King's excellent Jamie MacDougall. His 'Sound an alarm' has a thrilling, heroic ring, capped by eruption of brass and timpani in mid-course – a stunning Handelian coup, duly played for all its worth.

This new recording would get my vote, just, over King's, for the overall quality of the singing and its theatrical energy. But the balance of advantage is not all one way. Ideally, I'd want the King recording too, above all for his inclusion of those marvellous later additions to the 1746 score. **Richard Wigmore**

Selected comparison:

King's Consort, King (12/92) (HYPE) CDA66641/2

Leighton · F Martin · Alain

Alain Prélude pour l'office de Complies

Leighton Mass, Op 44^a **F Martin** Mass for Double Choir^b

^a**Mimi Doulton** sop ^a**Caitlin Goreing** contr

^a**William Hester** ten ^a**Joseph Edwards** bass

^{ab}**The Choir of King's College London /**

Joseph Fort with **James Orford** org

Delphian  DCD34211 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Kenneth Leighton's and Frank Martin's Masses begin almost identically, and for a time the similarities between them are so obvious that one would imagine Leighton already had a thorough acquaintanceship with the Swiss composer's setting when he started work on his in 1964. Yet Peter Quantrill's booklet note would seem to imply otherwise, and very quickly typical Leighton-isms wipe away any lingering aromas of Frank Martin.

Those Leighton-isms – driving, impulsive rhythms, highly energised chromaticisms, intensity built up through frequent repetitions of small musical cells, and that sense of continually building up polyphonic lines to some ecstatic climax – are fervently delivered by the gloriously robust King's College London choir. Joseph Fort is clearly very much in his element with this music and drives his singers onwards with an almost hypnotic zeal.

There are two substantial points of departure between these two Mass settings. First, Leighton calls for a quartet of soloists. Mimi Doulton is the first to show herself in a powerful, forthright setting of the *Gloria*, and while the other three – Caitlin Goreing, William Hester and Joseph Edwards – easily match her full-throated presence, their very forward placing in the sound stage can seem a little overwhelming.

The second difference comes with the *Credo*, where Leighton added an organ part in an otherwise unaccompanied work. Played here by James Orford on the organ of the church of St John the Evangelist, Upper Norwood, London, this creates an appropriately rugged foundation for this fundamental expression of Christian faith. But quite why Leighton did this remains something of a mystery; as does the decision to close the disc with a highly atmospheric, plainchant infused organ piece by Jehan Alain originally intended to conclude not a Mass setting but the late-evening office of the church.

Magnificent as the Leighton work is, it does not really hold a candle to the Martin Mass, which remains, for me, one of the truly great choral works, the finest *a cappella* setting of the Mass of the 20th century. Similarly, despite their outstanding performance of the Leighton, there is a real sense of involvement about the choir's singing in the Martin which is in an altogether different league. True, there

are rough edges and a few coarse moments here (notably in the 'Christe eleison'), but, above all, this is a performance of astonishing intensity and musicality. A powerfully moving interpretation of a powerfully moving work. **Marc Rochester**

Loewe

Das Sühnopfer des neuen Bundes
Monika Mauch sop Ulrike Malotta mez Georg Poplutz ten Andreas Burkhardt bar Arcis Vocalists, Munich; L'arpa Festante Baroque Orchestra / Thomas Gropper

Oehms (F) ② OC1706 (103' • DDD • T)



For all his industry and popular success in the oratorio genre, Carl Loewe is almost exclusively associated outside Germany with songs and ballads such as 'Tom der Reimer'. Given the lack of recordings available, it would be gratifying to announce that this Passion is the piece to set the record straight. Gratifying but disingenuous: the shelves of English church music libraries already groan with yellowing copies of devotional works as well written and practical for Passiontide choirs and congregations as they are sincere in expression and modest in ambition.

Dating from 1847, *Das Sühnopfer* ('The Expiatory Sacrifice of the New Covenant') opens in a sombre C minor and remains there for much of its 100 minutes. There are Mendelssohnian moments such as a brief F minor scena for Mary Magdalene and female chorus, but the comparison does Loewe no favours. In harmonising the chorales, he borrows heavily on 17th- and 18th-century models compiled by Johann Kuhnau, while his own inclination tends towards the well-trodden path.

Fashioned by a hymn researcher and teacher in Loewe's adopted home of Stettin, the libretto follows North German Passion models in its alternation of biblical narrative with lyrical reflection. Any distinction between them is diffused and integrated by Loewe in sharing what would otherwise be separate parts for an Evangelist and Christus between the four soloists, though the tenor still takes the lion's share of the work.

Having recorded a pair of oratorios by Graun, a Berlin contemporary of Bach, these forces bring the same period pitch, German Baroque performance style and acutely musical sensitivity to bear on *Das Sühnopfer*. A rival Naxos album from 2006 works within the same parameters but it's

a live recording, with attendant slips in tuning and ensemble. Working under studio conditions in a softly resonant Munich church, Thomas Gropper secures a much more polished performance. Try No 30, an airborne chorus for Zion's daughters supported by a delicately vaulted cello line, and if Loewe's blend of hand-me-down Bach and Schumann appeals, this new recording offers every incentive to investigate further. **Peter Quantrill**

Comparative version:

Reinemann (NAXO) 8 557635/6

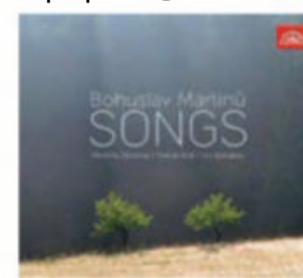
Martinů

The New Chap-Book, H288. New Slovak Songs, H126. Songs on One Page, H294. Songs on Two Pages, H302

Martina Janková sop Tomáš Králi bar

Ivo Kahánek pf

Supraphon (F) SU4235-2 (83' • DDD • T/t)



This deeply touching disc gathers together four sets of

Martinů's songs, both early and late. Two-thirds of it is given over to the *New Slovak Songs*, a striking sequence of folk arrangements dating from 1920, when Martinů was still in Czechoslovakia, though they remained unpublished until 1970. The work of a composer who was still finding his voice, they're shaded towards art songs, offsetting melodic directness with accompaniments that embrace post-Romantic and Impressionist harmonies in their illustration of both the natural and emotional worlds of the texts.

The remaining three sets, in contrast, are original compositions to folk poetry, written during Martinů's exile in the United States. Remarkable in every way, they pare the Czech folk idiom down to its absolute essence, their terse vocal lines supported by the sparest of accompaniments. There are elements of modernist abrasion in the piano-writing for *The New Chap-Book* of 1942 that glance back to the works of Martinů's Paris period in the 1930s. In the *Songs on One and Two Pages*, however, dating from 1943 and 1944 respectively, we find only the simplest piano chords that frequently drift towards harmonic irresolution. In all three sets, many of the songs last less than a minute, and the effect is at once fragmented and timeless, suggesting brief, painful memories of the country from which Martinů was now tragically separated by war.

Though Martinů probably intended each set to be sung by a single performer,

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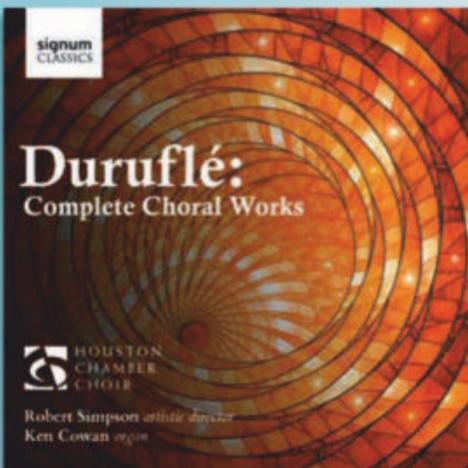
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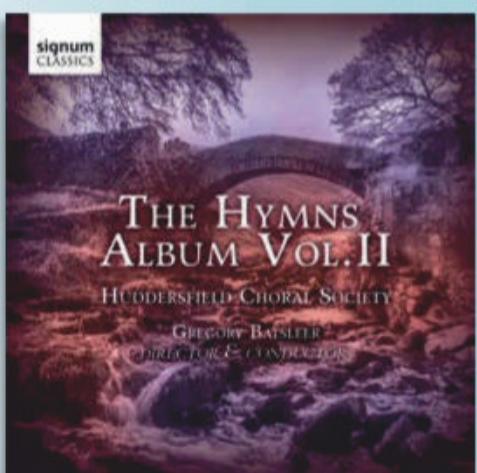
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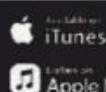
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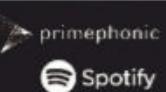


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Martina Janková and Tomáš Král divide the songs between them, depending on the sex of the protagonist, turning dialogues into duets when necessary, and Janková's clear, silvery soprano offsets Král's light, warm baritone throughout. Nothing is over-dramatised or tipped towards sentimentality, though Janková can often be extraordinarily poignant – the grieving 'My mother, my mother', which opens *New Slovak Songs*, really gets under your skin – while Král is amorous and witty, engaging and soulful by turns. Pianist Ivo Kahánek, meanwhile, binds the songs together with playing of understated dexterity and emotional restraint. It's a lovely disc, most beautifully done. **Tim Ashley**

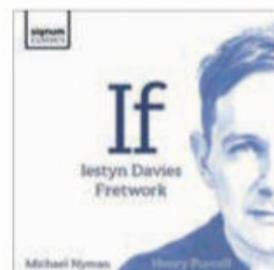
Nyman • Purcell

'If'

Nyman *Balancing the Books*. From 'The Diary of Anne Frank'. Music after a While. No Time in Eternity. The Self-Laudatory Hymn of Inanna and her Omnipotence **Purcell** Evening Hymn, Z193. Music for a while, Z583 No 2. O solitude, my sweetest choice, Z406

Iestyn Davies countertenor **Fretwork**

Signum F SIGCD586 (68' • DDD • T)



Last year the American countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo gave us a recital pairing music by Philip Glass and Handel (Decca). Now the British countertenor Iestyn Davies takes his turn straddling the minimalism/Baroque divide, bringing together works by Michael Nyman and Henry Purcell in a slick new collaboration with the viol consort Fretwork. Neither is, of course, the first to make the connection. But while the two repertoires may share some of the same musical processes, their composers deploy them to opposite effect, as 'If' neatly demonstrates.

The recording brings together songs by Purcell (all arranged for voice and viol consort by Fretwork's own Richard Boothby) with a selection of Nyman miniatures including episodes from *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Fretwork commissions *The Self-Laudatory Hymn of Inanna and her Omnipotence* and *Music after a While* (a premiere recording), as well as two more extended musical sequences – the song-cycle *No Time in Eternity* and *Balancing the Books*, arranged here for viols.

The Nyman performances are exemplary – crisp and cleanly articulated from Fretwork and dispatched by Davies with a vacant, unrippled purity that is so

essential to the music, and must be hard-won for this instinctively expressive performer. The soundtrack extracts are painfully sweet in the ear but there's a wonderfully straight-faced swagger (and, finally, some declamatory drama) to *Inanna*, and the aphoristic Herrick cycle *No Time in Eternity* comes off beautifully.

Most interesting, though, is *Balancing the Books*. Originally composed for the Swingle Singers, Boothby's wordless arrangement for Fretwork's five viols draws strange and wonderful colours from the consort – now a Bluegrass or Appalachian folk band or grinding accordion, now a glossy string quartet.

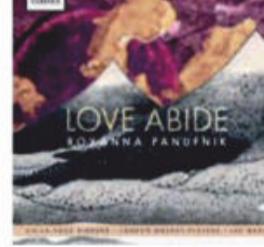
It's hard to believe that Purcell left no songs with viol consort accompaniment, and Boothby's meticulous arrangements offer a tantalising glimpse of what might have been. Rather than resting on the cool firmness of a harpsichord, 'Evening Hymn' comes cradled in string warmth and lulling legato, while 'Music for a while' takes on a striking new darkness, needle-point dissonances elegantly twisted in the wound. Best, though, is 'O solitude', with its chilly opening plucked accompaniment. All are immaculately sung by Davies, whose Peter Pan voice sounds fresher and smoother than ever. **Alexandra Coglan**

R Panufnik

'Love Abide'

Love Abide^a. Love Endureth^b. Magnificat and Nunc dimittis^c. Mass of the Angels^d. Schola Missa De Angelis^d. Zen Love Song^e
^dGilles Sinclair treb^aHeather Shipp mez
^dBen Fleetwood Smyth ten^aMark Stone bar
^eLoli Day jinashi-shakuhachi^cRichard Johnson,
^dTom Ward org^aColla Voce Singers; ^cExultate Singers / David Ogden; ^{ad}Love Abide Children's Choir; ^{be}Voces8 / Barnaby Smith; ^{ad}London Mozart Players / Lee Ward

Signum F SIGCD564 (64' • DDD • T/t)



If I had to choose a 'glass-half-full' contemporary composer, then Roxanna Panufnik would be near the top of my list. Her music exudes openness and inclusivity, and it is in the choral settings where hope and positivity – two words that lie at the heart of her work – are most keenly felt.

This hope is communicated, prism-like, through the rich range of styles and musical references heard in Panufnik's vocal music, upon which she draws with almost carefree abandon. In *Love Endureth*, snippets of Spanish Sephardic chants

combine with Hebrew psalm tunes to form a striking synthesis in a powerful and assertive performance by Voces8 under Barnaby Smith. Sufi rhythms fuse with Turkish modes in 'Love is the Master' (from *Love Abide*) to generate a mantra-like atmosphere, while the evocative, earthy tones of the shakuhachi flute combine with resonant voices in *Zen Love Song*.

Sombre moments do appear in Panufnik's music from time to time and she does not always cast her stylistic net so wide. A more cautionary tone is communicated at the beginning of 'Love Abide', which features mezzo-soprano Heather Shipp's resonant vibrato, although the ending remains optimistic; while the two Mass settings that round off this disc draw on the rich, reverberant hues of the English choral tradition. The London Mozart Players provide adequate support without ever drawing attention to themselves.

Panufnik has produced several important choral works since *Love Abide*'s original release on Warner Classics in 2013, including last year's Proms commission *Songs of Darkness, Dreams of Light* and the large-scale oratorio *Faithful Journey – a Mass for Poland* for the CBSO. However, much of her recent work can be seen to be built on the solid foundations laid down on this impressively varied and diverse collection. A music of hope in dark and troubled times. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Schubert

'Heimweh'

Abschied von der Erde, D829. An den Mond, D259. An mein Herz, D860. Ave Maria, D839. Erster Verlust, D226. Heimweh, D456. Der Hirt auf dem Felsen, D965^a. Jäger ruhe von der Jagd, D838. Raste Krieger, D837. Totengräbers Heimweh, D842. Vier Gesänge aus Wilhelm Meister, D877 – No 2, Heiss mich nicht reden; No 3, So lasst mich scheinen; No 4, Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt. Viola, D786. Der Zwerg, D771

Anna Lucia Richter sop

^aMatthias Schorn cl Gerold Huber pf

Pentatone F PTC5186 722

(81' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Anna Lucia Richter's singing of the bittersweet 'An den Mond' – gentle, inward, the ornaments gracefully etched – immediately reveals her gift, priceless in Schubert, of simple sincerity. Time and again in a programme centring on the *echt* Schubertian theme of *Heimweh* – meaning both homesickness and nostalgia –

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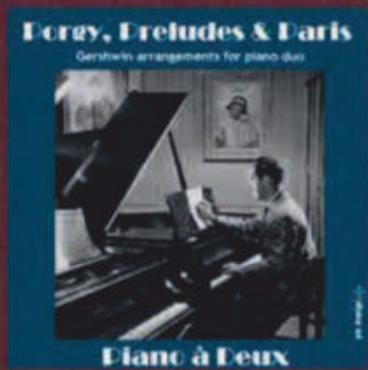


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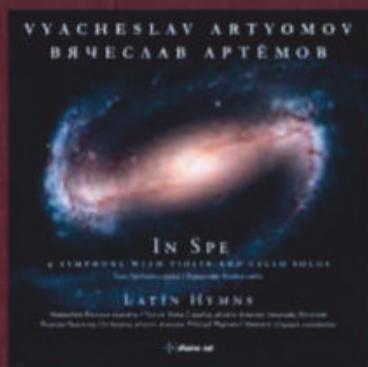


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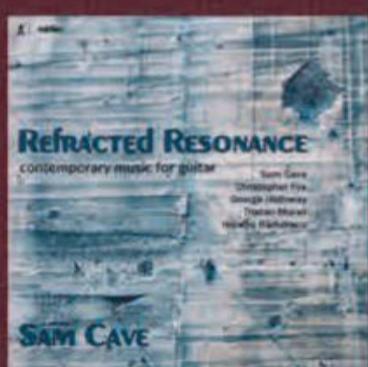
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Richter's pure, vernal soprano, care for words and supple, expressive phrasing are well-nigh ideal. In three Mignon songs she movingly catches the mysterious waif's vulnerability and otherworldliness, bleaching her tone at the opening of 'Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt', and finding a warmer colour at the vision of a comforting friend ('Ein jeder sucht im Arm des Freundes') in 'Heiss mich nicht reden'.

Richter is no less touching in Ellen's songs from Scott's *The Lady of the Lake*. She floats a limpid *bel canto* line in 'Ave Maria', the repeated accompanying figuration perfectly gauged by Gerold Huber, and brings a tender, confiding intimacy to Ellen's two lullabies. 'The echoes of a hunting song in a beautiful dream', wrote Schubert's friend Anton Ottenwalt of 'Jäger, ruhe von der Jagd'. Richter's singing, held down to *pp* and *ppp*, makes his point.

Two of the songs chosen by Richter, the macabre ballad 'Der Zwerg' and 'Totengräbers Heimweh', in which an old gravedigger philosophises on the meaning of life and death, are anything but natural territory for a light lyric soprano. Yet in both songs her musical intelligence and dramatic use of the text go far to compensating for a lack of tonal depth. She burns into her consonants as only a native German can in the despairing opening of 'Totengräbers Heimweh' and conjures an unearthly stillness in the gravedigger's blissful embrace of death. I wasn't quite convinced by Richter's 'wicked witch' voice for the tormented dwarf in 'Der Zwerg'. But from her pale, almost girlish tones at the twilit opening, she catches the song's eeriness and mounting anguish without ever forcing, abetted by Huber's characteristically subtle coloration.

The floral ballad 'Viola', to a gushingly sentimental poem by Schubert's friend Franz von Schober, is always tricky to bring off. Singer and pianist ensure it works here. Richter's purity of line and tone give the chant-like refrain an ideal fragile tenderness; and, buoyed by Huber's ever-lively rhythmic sense, she vividly dramatises the successive phases of the violet's plight. Richter is in her element, too, in 'Der Hirt auf dem Felsen'. In tandem with Matthias Schorn's sensitive clarinet, she delicately captures the shepherd's shifts of mood in the opening section, and then skips and frolics blithely in anticipation of a spring that the composer never lived to see. It sets the seal on a delectable recital from a young soprano whose combination of vocal freshness and unforced expressiveness make her a natural in Schubert.

Richard Wigmore

GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

Anna Lucia Richter

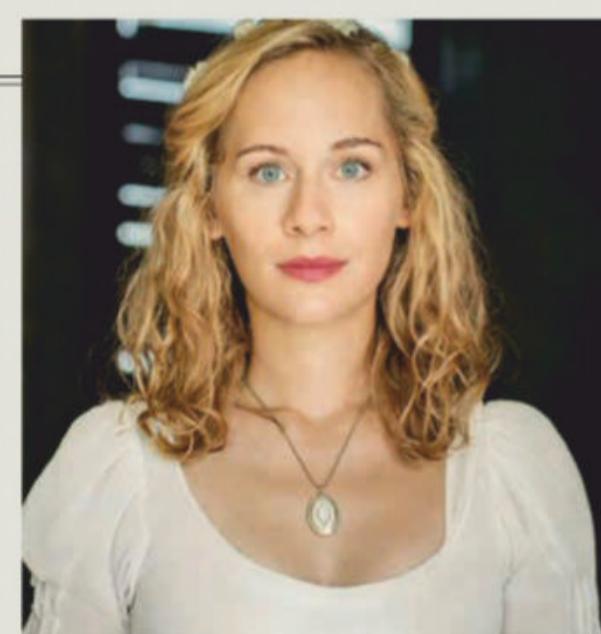
The German soprano discusses Schubert, youthful innocence and capturing the moment

This is your first Schubert disc. How did you choose which songs to include?

For me it was always clear that if I ever recorded an all-Schubert album at a young age then I would choose the Mignon songs. Since high school I have adored this mysterious Goethe character: is it really a she or a he? A girl or a woman? Erotic or childish? Wild or elegant? Schubert seems to be sure that she is a young, pure, innocent girl (in contrast to the Mignon songs by Hugo Wolf). Then I looked for another female character and found Ellen. I normally would not have chosen the famous 'Ave Maria', but placing this song in the context of Ellen's two other songs brings a completely different effect. It is not kitschy at all, but sincere and unsophisticated. Both Mignon and Ellen have to deal with homesickness, parting and longing, and I looked for other songs that fit with this topic. I feel this is one of the most important topics of our life: we are always looking for the absolute security of our childhood.

What are the challenges in conveying the sung texts in Schubert?

In contrast to Schumann, for example, Schubert set poems (in addition to Goethe etc) which are not the highest quality, and



would have been forgotten without his music – such as the huge song 'Viola'. But even then I think I understand what fascinated him about these texts. You always find very human, authentic and vulnerable aspects in these poems, and as a singer it is my duty to illuminate these facets without overplaying anything.

You bring a sense of youthful innocence and purity to these songs – is this something you were aiming for and conscious of?

We singers often feel inspired by different genres we sing. When I sing the last section of 'Der Hirt auf dem Felsen', for example, I immediately think of Bach's aria 'Ich freue mich auf meinen Tod', the last movement of his cantata *Ich habe genug*. I think Schubert's music should be as pure and honest as possible, and I try to sing it how I feel it in the moment. This can be risky – you have to be very flexible and open to letting the music take you in different directions.

Tavener



Angels. Annunciation. As one who has slept. Five Anthems from The Veil of the Temple. God is with us (A Christmas Proclamation). Hymn to the Mother of God. The Lamb. The Lord's Prayer. Love bade me welcome. Song for Athene. They are all gone into the world of light

Winchester Cathedral Choir / Andrew Lumsden with George Castle org

Hyperion © CDA68255 (70' • DDD • T)



I am finishing this review precisely on what would have been John Tavener's 75th birthday. Such an anniversary causes one to reflect anew upon what was by any standards a remarkable career, and this outstanding new

recording is a very good way of so doing. Tavener had a long and close association with Winchester (and still does, in fact, in the form of the Tavener Centre), so it was a particularly inspired idea to commission booklet notes from Martin Neary, the former Organist and Master of the Music, who was the commissioner and first performer of so many of the composer's works.

One such example is *God is with us*, commissioned for the 1987 carol service. I have to say that I had never found this to be one of Tavener's most successful works, but this performance has won me over, for two reasons. The first is that tenor William Kendall makes such a fine job of the solo part, and the second is that the unexpected and dramatic entry of the organ here sounds utterly

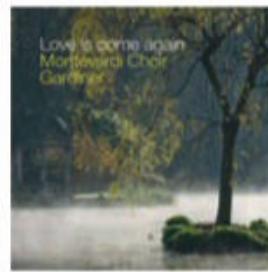
convincing, which has everything to do with the way Andrew Lumsden paces the work. This is followed by two works written two years earlier, the first *Hymn to the Mother of God* and *Love bade me welcome*, both outstanding pieces born of a unique imagination. Only Tavener would have extracted so much from a simple device as the double-choir canon in the Hymn, or thought of setting Herbert in a way that suggests Bulgarian chant.

Other Tavener classics appear too, most notably *Song for Athene*, but much attention is also paid to later works, including five anthems from *The Veil of the Temple* (2002) and *They are all gone into the world of light*, a setting of Henry Vaughan from 2011. There is a lushness about these works, harmonically speaking, that is generally absent from the earlier pieces, but Tavener's own voice is nevertheless always apparent: indeed, I have been at pains to point out on more than one occasion that his voice is clearly audible in his music from whatever period – the compositional voice of *Últimos Ritos* is absolutely the same as that of *Mary of Egypt*, for example. One piece I am particularly pleased to hear again is *Annunciation* from 1992. Such is the immediacy of this work that you would swear that Tavener had actually been present when the Archangel brought the news to Mary. It is followed by a superb rendition of *As one who has slept*, once again brought alive by the impeccable pacing and by the fantastic blend of the choir (do they ever breathe?). This is a showroom demonstration of just what boy and girl choristers singing together can achieve. A truly magnificent birthday present.

Ivan Moody

'Love is Come Again'

Anonymous Missa Orbis factor – Kyrie. Non nobis Domine **Britten** Lov'st thou me? **Byrd** Alleluia: And it came to pass **Cornysh** Woefully array'd **Este** Ego sum panis vivus **Gabrieli** Surrexit pastor bonus **Gesualdo** O vos omnes **Gippenbusch** Die ganze Welt, Herr Jesu Christ **L'Héritier** Surrexit pastor bonus **Morley** Eheu! They have taken Jesus **Rheinberger** Abendlied **Schütz** But Mary stood without the sepulchre. Verily the Lord is risen **Tallis** If ye love me **Taverner** Dum transisset Sabbatum **Tisserand** Peter saith, I go a-fishing **Traditional** Bless'd Mary Magdalene. Love is come again. The Seven Virgins **Wipo of Burgundy** And behold two of them went that day
Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque Soloists / John Eliot Gardiner
SDG (F) SDG731 (68' • DDD • T/t)



If, like me, you enjoyed the eclectic and beautifully poised Christmas disc 'Once as I Remember ...' from John Eliot Gardiner and his Monteverdi Choir some two decades ago (Philips, 12/98), you will be both intrigued and delighted by his Easter offering. 'Love is Come Again' revisits music from the annual mime-play held at Gardiner's family home, Springhead, directed by his mother. The music was chosen by Gardiner himself when an undergraduate and in his words contains 'a fantastic sort of mosaic of magnificent pieces all associated with the Easter story'. This recording includes several additions to that original programme and the booklet contains a history of the Easter festival experience with archive photographs.

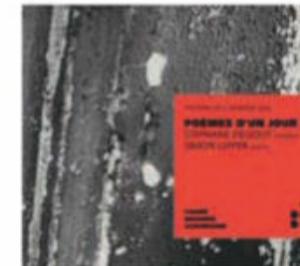
If all that sounds rather quaint, fear not, for this is no sepia-tinged indulgence: it packs a punch. The sequence of plainsong, motets and carols are driven by their texts, and their performance leads Gardiner and his singers to occasional extremes. The first sequence, 'The Crucifixion', opens with a Herefordshire carol *The Seven Virgins* sung with arresting simplicity by Angharad Rowlands. Gesualdo's *O vos omnes* follows with shocking, highly sculpted and overtly madrigalian immediacy as Gardiner draws every possible dramatic fibre to the fore. And energy does not let up for Cornysh's *Woefully array'd*, a riot of direct enunciation, stark and as uncomfortable as its subject. Sadly Taverner's *Dum transisset Sabbatum* fails to soar in the middling acoustic of Saffron Hall and an awkward entry/edit (7'08") combined with emphatic articulation leaves the final 'Alleluia' sounding somewhat irritable. This tendency to over-articulate infuses the title-track with the air of a choral competition: four iterations of 'wheAT thaT springeth green' is a shame. But wait for L'Héritier's *Surrexit pastor bonus* to hear Gardiner's Midas touch: I love the slow, sumptuous tempo, like honey dripping from a spoon.

For the sequence 'The Road to Emmaus', Rheinberger's *Abendlied* is a golden moment, followed by Hugo Hymas's gripping Evangelist in extracts from Schütz's *Historia der Auferstehung Jesu Christi* (English texts). There is so much to explore on this disc – from an adaption of Britten's *Canticle II* to a glorious performance of *Ego sum panis*

vivus attributed to Leonora d'Este – that, on paper at least, it looks like the mosaic is too complicated for the programme to hang together. In reality, though, it does work. Springhead must have been a magical place. **Edward Breen**

'Poèmes d'un jour'

Brahms Fünf Lieder, Op 72 – No 1, Alte Liebe; No 3, O kühler Wald. Auf dem Kirchhofe, Op 105 No 4. Feldeinsamkeit, Op 86 No 2. Lerchengesang, Op 70 No 2. Die Mainacht, Op 43 No 2. Nicht mehr zu dir zu gehen, Op 32 No 2. Willst du, dass ich geh?, Op 71 No 4
Fauré Poèmes d'un jour, Op 21. Aurore, Op 39 No 1. Automne, Op 18 No 1 **Schumann** Zwölf Gedichte, Op 35
Stéphane Degout bar **Simon Lepper** pf
B Records (F) LBM017 (71' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Théâtre de l'Athénée, Paris, December 18, 2017



For his previous solo albums, Stéphane Degout has always confined himself to the French repertory, of which he remains a leading and indeed remarkable interpreter. His latest recital, however, recorded live in Paris with Simon Lepper at the piano, marks a self-conscious move into new territory, as Fauré gives way to Brahms and Schumann in a carefully crafted programme exploring themes of nostalgia and transience as they edge towards thoughts of mortality. It's an exceptional disc, in many ways. The progression from mélodie to Lied seems both natural and inevitable, and the qualities one values so much in Degout's Fauré – the integration of text and line, his almost instinctive use of colour and dynamics, the uncompromising directness of expression – are those that also make his Brahms and Schumann so utterly compelling.

His voice has darkened somewhat of late. One notices a greater weight and fullness in his lower registers, which allow him to sing Brahms like one born to it. 'Nicht mehr zu dir zu gehen', beginning low in the voice, bristles with suppressed anger and resentment. Shafts of regret intrude on the solitary introspection of 'Die Mainacht', while 'Auf dem Kirchhofe' is all fierce declamation until bitterness is replaced by lyrical warmth towards the close, as death is finally viewed as a release rather than as extinction. Degout's way with Schumann's Op 35 Kerner set is unsparing. He treats it very much

as a unified cycle, oscillating between bravado and despair until the final collapse of 'Alte Laute', powering his way thrillingly through 'Wanderlied' and 'Stille Tränen', though he also possesses the subtlety and expressive range to encompass the desolate narrative of 'Stirb, Lieb' und Freud' and the dark morbidity of 'Auf das Trinkglas eines verstorbenen Freundes'. It's a formidable performance.

None of it would be quite so overwhelming, though, without Lepper, who is comparably strong here. This is very much a partnership of equals who think and feel alike in the way they present each song as a complete emotional statement, and the recording superbly captures the rapport they have both with each other and their audience, who applaud with growing enthusiasm as the concert progresses. There are a few extraneous noises – some coughing and the rustle of music being turned – though they're not intrusive and the sound is otherwise spacious and finely balanced. The one drawback here is that the accompanying material consists solely of a poster of the cover photograph with an interview with Degout and Lepper on the reverse, and you need to search the internet for texts and translations. It's worth doing, though: this is a great recital, and you need to hear it. **Tim Ashley**

'Sirènes'

Berlioz La mort de Cléopâtre. Les nuits d'été
Liszt Es war ein König in Thule, S278/2.
 Freudvoll und leidvoll - S280/1; S280/2. Im
 Rhein, im schönen Strom, S272/2. Die Loreley,
 S273/2. Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh, S306/2
Wagner Wesendonck Lieder
Stéphanie d'Oustrac mez **Pascal Jourdan** pf
 Harmonia Mundi  HMM90 2621 (76' • DDD • T/t)



This is a paradoxical disc in some ways. Given Stéphanie d'Oustrac's track record in her native French repertory, most people, one suspects, will be drawn to it by the thought of her singing Berlioz, though the real revelation here is the *Wesendonck Lieder*, which is all the more surprising given that she has never, to my knowledge, sung Wagner on stage. It must be said at the outset that d'Oustrac's artistry is compelling throughout but that the Wagner owes something of its impact to the fact that her voice is at its freshest. Elsewhere, the close-ish recording captures an occasional

flutter or pulse in her tone when singing softly in her middle registers. It doesn't pull her off pitch but it sometimes feels intrusive, most notably in Berlioz's 'Absence' and Liszt's 'Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh'.

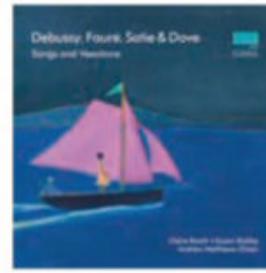
In the *Wesendonck Lieder*, however, the pulse, though noticeable, is under greater control, and d'Oustrac's smoky tone, careful dynamic shading and wonderful sense of line and phrase conspire with Pascal Jourdan's marvellous playing to give us something special. The atmosphere of erotic morbidity is breathtakingly sustained in a performance that gazes beyond *Tristan* towards both the *fin de siècle* French mélodie and the darker Lieder of Strauss and Wolf. There's an immense surge of passion at the heart of 'Schmerzen' and d'Oustrac's ravishing, unearthly high *pianissimos* seem to hover in the air at the close of 'Im Treibhaus', where Jourdan is at his most refined and subtle. It's all superbly done.

The same combination of intelligence and immediacy is very much at work in Berlioz and Liszt, meanwhile. The emotional climaxes in *Les nuits d'été* come, unusually, with 'Sur les lagunes', where the great outcry of 'Ah! Comme elle était belle' is truly shocking after the numbed grief of the opening, and in 'Au cimetière', where d'Oustrac's unearthly *pianissimos*, so sensuous in Wagner, add immeasurably to the song's horror. Liszt's big narratives of the Lorely and the King of Thule are grippingly delivered, while Jourdan, tremendous throughout, does remarkable things as the boat founders in 'Die Lorely' and the King hurls his goblet into the sea. He also makes the strongest case for Berlioz's much-maligned piano-writing, though even he can't quite disguise the fact that the accompaniment of 'Le spectre de la rose' sounds like a transcription of an orchestral original, when, of course, the piano version came first. More than well worth hearing for the Wagner, though there is also much to enjoy elsewhere.

Tim Ashley

'Songs and Vexations'

Debussy Cinq Poèmes de Charles Baudelaire
Dove Letters from Claude Fauré Après un
 rêve, Op 7 No 1. Au bord de l'eau, Op 8 No 1.
 Clair de lune, Op 46 No 2. Nocturne, Op 43
 No 2. Le roses d'Ispahan, Op 39 No 4 **Satie**
 Air du poète. Élégie. Je te veux. Trois
 Mélodies. Vexations
Claire Booth sop **Susan Bickley** mez
Andrew Matthews-Owen pf
 Nimbus Alliance  NI6372 (69' • DDD • T/t)



In his booklet note Andrew Matthews-Owen explains the long gestation of this programme. But you can already get a sense from just diving straight in: we've a careful and astute selection of some wonderful songs by Debussy and those around him, clustered around an eminently enjoyable new commission from Jonathan Dove.

Letters from Claude is essentially just that. Dove takes passages from his letters to two women, which reflect the complexity of Debussy's love life: Rosalie Texier (aka Lilly), who agreed to marry him after he threatened suicide; and Emma Bardac, the mother of one of his pupils and whom he married four years after breaking things off with Lilly.

The letters to both, therefore, reflect very different stages in the respective relationships, and they are split between Claire Booth and Susan Bickley according to recipient. Sometimes they sing reflectively alone, sometimes set together in counterpoint: Debussy's words are brought to life, then, through their 'readings' by both women. It's a complex idea but one that is cleverly and engagingly realised by Dove in music that takes Debussy as its starting point, before heading into more contemporary musical worlds. And it's difficult to imagine it much better performed than here.

Essentially the emotional centrepiece of the disc nevertheless remains Debussy's own ever-remarkable *Cinq Poèmes de Charles Baudelaire*. Booth throws herself fully into their heady world, her voice breathy and open in its timbre and often indecently sensuous – and always used intelligently. Matthews-Owen rises to the challenges of the piano parts very impressively. The Satie songs are somewhat overshadowed in comparison, and Bickley's mezzo is not always ideally refined, but there's little resisting the gorgeous opening 'Elégie', even if it's not in the same languid league as Barbara Hannigan's account on her Satie recital (Winter & Winter, 6/16). Add in fine accounts of Fauré's chansons (Booth's 'Au bord de l'eau', in particular, is terrific) and this amounts to a rewarding recital and, especially with Dove's new work, a valuable addition to the catalogue.

Hugo Shirley

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WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month, **Mark Pullinger**'s point of departure is ...

Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini* (1876)

Tchaikovsky's symphonic fantasy *Francesca da Rimini* plunges the listener into the fiery realms of Dante's Inferno, more specifically the Second Circle of Hell (Lust). It depicts the tale of Francesca who falls in love with her cruel husband's brother, Paolo. Their affair is discovered by her husband and she and Paolo are killed, condemned to hell for their adultery, trapped in a violent storm. It's Tchaikovsky at his most impassioned and feverish, especially the ripsnorting coda. In the composer's letters, he references Gustave Doré's Paolo and Francesca illustrations, but also seemed inspired by Liszt and Wagner, having just attended the inaugural Bayreuth Festival. Jurowski delivers a scorching account.

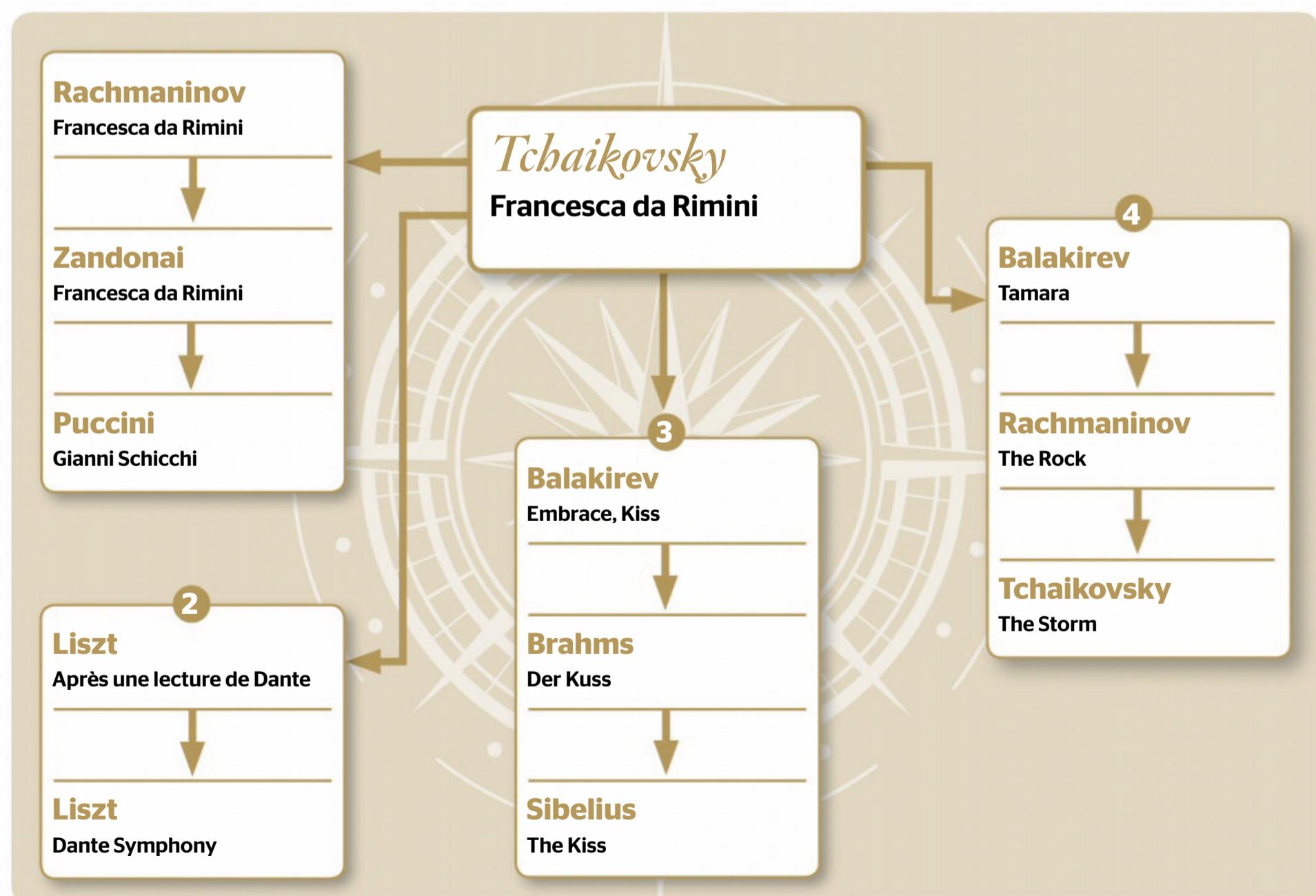
● LPO / Vladimir Jurowski (LPO, 1/18)

1 *Dante at the opera*

Rachmaninov *Francesca da Rimini* (1906) Rachmaninov's operatic version is compact – a prologue, two scenes and epilogue – lasting little more than an hour. The ghost of Virgil leads Dante down to the Second Circle of Hell where he meets Francesca and Paolo and asks them to tell their story. The first tableau is terrific, where the suspicious Lanceotto sets a trap for his wife.

● Gothenburg SO / Neeme Järvi (DG, 5/98)

Zandonai *Francesca da Rimini* (1914) Eight years after Rachmaninov's opera came Riccardo Zandonai's version, bursting



with impassioned Italian *verismo* writing. The finale, where Gianciotto catches his wife and brother in the act and slays them both, is thrilling. An opera which deserves to be better known.

● Freiburg PO / Fabrice Bollon (CPO, 1/16)

Puccini *Gianni Schicchi*

(1918) Still in Dante's Inferno, along comes the figure of Gianni Schicchi, who swindles the Donati family of an inheritance by impersonating the deceased Buoso. Puccini's one-act opera is a work of comic genius, containing one of his greatest hits, 'O mio babbino caro', where Schicchi's daughter, Lauretta, threatens to throw herself into the River Arno if he won't help out her boyfriend's family. In the closing scene, Schicchi speaks to the audience, shrugging off Dante's judgement, pleading extenuating circumstances.

● Maggio Musicale Fiorentino / Lamberto Gardelli (Decca, 12/62^R)



William Blake's vision of The Circle of the Lustful (The Whirlwind of Lovers, including Paolo and Francesca)

2 Liszt's *Dante*

Liszt *Après une lecture de Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* (1849)

Liszt's *Dante* Sonata closes his second volume of *Années de pèlerinage* ('Italie'). The opening section depicts the wailing souls in Hell, with heavy use of the tritone (the interval known as 'the devil in music'). The secondary theme is heavenly, perhaps representing Beatrice, who appears as one of Dante's guides in *The Divine Comedy*.

● Lise de la Salle (Naïve, 9/11)

Liszt *Dante Symphony* (1857) Less a symphony, more two symphonic poems: 'Inferno' and 'Purgatorio', as depicted in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Liszt originally planned a third movement to depict Paradise, but was persuaded out of it by Wagner. The theatrical opening depicts Dante's and Virgil's journey through the nine Circles of Hell. The *Andante amoroso* depicts the love of Paolo and Francesca.

● BBC Philharmonic / Gianandrea Noseda (Chandos, 8/09)

3 Rodin's *The Kiss*

(originally entitled *Francesca da Rimini*)

Balakirev *Embrace, Kiss* (1858) Mily Balakirev, self-appointed leader of The Mighty Handful, wasn't exactly a prolific composer himself. His little folksong 'Embrace, Kiss' sets verse by Alexei Kol'tsov where the poet despairs at his beloved's mournful dress, urging her to 'embrace, kiss and caress' with passion.

● Daniil Shtoda; Larissa Gergieva (Warner Classics, 5/01)

Brahms *Der Kuss* (1862) Much more innocent than anything in Dante's Inferno, Brahms's song (from his Op 19 set) describes the poet as, under the May blossoms, he tremblingly steals his first kiss.

● Andreas Schmidt; Helmut Deutsch (CPO)

Sibelius *The Kiss* (1914) Sibelius sets a Swedish text by Viktor Rydberg as part of his Op 72, the passionate kiss the poet receives greeted like a prisoner freed from his imprisoned soul.

● Tom Krause; Irwin Gage (Decca, 2/85^R)

4 Russian symphonic poems

Balakirev *Tamara* (1867-82) Based on verse by Mikhail Lermontov, Balakirev's exotic symphonic poem *Tamara* depicts an ancient tower in the Caucasus Mountains where there resides the beautiful, but cunning, Princess Tamara. She lures passing men to spend the night with her. At the frenzied climax of each encounter, she kills her victim whose body is then thrown from the battlements, to be swept away down the River Terek. It almost rivals Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances* or Rimsky's *Scheherazade* for heady excitement.

● LSO / Valery Gergiev (LSO Live, A/16)

Rachmaninov *The Rock* (1893) Rachmaninov's *The Rock* also has a Lermontov connection, the composer inscribing the lines 'The golden cloud slept through the night / Upon the breast of the giant-rock' on the epilogue. But Rachmaninov was also inspired by a Chekhov story about a roadside meeting between a young girl and an older man one Christmas Eve. The composer impressed Tchaikovsky when he played through the piano score.

● BBC Philharmonic / Gianandrea Noseda (Chandos)

Tchaikovsky *The Storm* (1864) We return full circle (of hell?) to Tchaikovsky and his very early work *The Storm*, based on the same Ostrovsky play which later inspired Janáček's opera, *Káťa Kabanová*. Anton Rubinstein disapproved of it and it was never published in Tchaikovsky's lifetime. It's a brooding work, suitably tempestuous if rather episodic in nature.

● Gothenburg SO / Neeme Järvi (BIS, A/06)

Available to stream at Qobuz, Apple Music and Spotify

Opera



Tim Ashley listens to a cut version of Verdi's problematic *I Lombardi*:

Ania Jeruc is a fine Giselda, floating her "Salve Maria" with superb poise, yet possessing heft and dramatic fire ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 96**



Mark Pullinger hears Mozart and more from Olga Peretyatko:

*In its day, Paisiello's *Barbiere* was extremely successful ... until Rossini's version usurped it* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 97**

Cavalli



Il Giasone

Valer Sabadus counterten.....	Giasone
Kristina Hammarström mez.....	Medea
Kristina Mkhitarian sop.....	Isifile/Sole
Raúl Giménez ten.....	Egeo
Migran Agadzhanyan ten.....	Demo/Volano
Willard White bar.....	Orestes/Giove
Alexander Milev bass.....	Ercole
Dominique Visse counterten.....	Delfa/Eolo
Mariana Flores sop.....	Alinda
Günes Gürle bass-bar.....	Besso
Mary Femininear sop.....	Amore
Cappella Mediterranea / Leonardo García Alarcón	

Stage director **Serena Sinigaglia**

Video director **Isabelle Soulard**

Alpha (DVD) ALPHA718 (3h 2' • NTSC • 16:9 • 5.1 • s)

Recorded live at the Grand Théâtre, Geneva,

February 2017

Includes synopsis



There's something riotous about *Il Giasone*. Cavalli's 1649 opera – the most-performed of the 17th century –

positively delights in collisions, clashes and confrontations, whether of lofty Classical mythology and low sexual comedy, tragedy and farce or simple beauty and grotesque exaggeration. It's a postmodern opera *avant la lettre*, gleefully poking fun at conventions and expectations while manipulating its audience with the very same. No wonder directors go mad for it. Mariame Clément's 2010 production for Flemish Opera (Dynamic, 8/12) gathered inspiration by the loaded armful, flinging everything ancient and modern at the canvas. There's something of that, too, about Serena Sinigaglia's 2017 production for Geneva.

Jason (Valer Sabadus), the feckless lover caught between two women, is a linen-clad Edwardian Lothario, his tongue even smoother than his boyish cheeks. He drifts amorously into the various orbits of tattooed, modern-day muscle-boy Hercules (whose Argonauts come in matching camo-gear and wife-beaters), his abandoned wife

Hypsipyle (Kristina Mkhitarian), styled as a flapper with a bevy of drop-waisted ladies frothing around her, and gods in elaborate Classical get-up, feathered headdresses, gilded armour and all. Pick a period, any period.

The effect is boisterous, exuberant and just a little too much. Leonardo García Alarcón conducts an account by his own Cappella Mediterranea that's very much in the same spirit. Instrumental ritornellos (borrowed, presumably, from other Cavalli scores) come liberally spiced with tambourines and castanets – unapologetically gaudy gilding on a lithe, light-footed account that throws itself headlong between moods. It's when all the dancing stops, though, that this account comes into its own. A top-notch cast really savour the score's lyricism, balancing all the cross-dressing camp with something disarmingly heartfelt.

Sabadus is well cast. Reports from Geneva suggest that his soft, bladeless voice struggled to carry in the house; but, with the balance tweaked for DVD, he's the embodiment of vacillating, soft-focus sensuality, opening with a 'Delizie contenti' of dangerous sweetness. He's caught between the sterner charms of Kristina Hammarström's Medea (conjuring a ferocious 'Dell'antro magico', her mezzo suddenly as craggy as Ezio Toffolutti's set) and Mkhitarian's Hypsipyle, who may be dressed in delicate pastels but whose delivery is much bolder, chilled right down to blanched stillness at the start of Act 2 before reverting to her habitually brighter, deeper tones.

Dominique Visse is an irrepressible Delfa, taking 'her' pleasure wherever possible, and there are fine cameos from the veteran tenor Raúl Giménez as the cuckolded Egeo (cruelly styled as Peter Ustinov's Poirot in *Death on the Nile*), Willard White's Oreste and Migran Agadzhanyan as a nervily energetic Demo.

A blissfully happy ending squares the circle of this ambiguous story, placing moral scruples firmly out of sight and tucking away any fraying psychological

threads. Sinigaglia's production is Cavalli at play, an unruly Babel of sensation. The DVD lacks any extras and a complete libretto, though a basic synopsis and essay are provided. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Chabrier



L'Étoile

Julie Boulianne mez.....	Aloès
Elliot Madore bar.....	Hérisson de Porc-Épic
Christophe Mortagne ten.....	King Ouf I
Stéphanie d'Oustrac mez.....	Lazuli
Hélène Guilmette sop.....	Princess Laoula
Jérôme Varnier bass.....	Siroco
François Piolino ten.....	Tapioca
Chorus of Dutch National Opera; The Hague Residentie Orchestra / Patrick Fournillier	

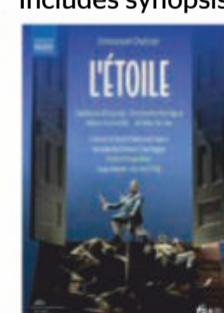
Stage director **Laurent Pelly**

Video director **François Roussillon**

Naxos (DVD) 2 110595; (Blu-ray) NBD0091V (115' • NTSC • 1080i • 16:9 • DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • o • s)

Recorded live, October 13 & 16, 2014

Includes synopsis



Given its growing popularity, it comes as something of a surprise to discover that Chabrier's wonderful 1877 *opéra-bouffe* has for many years been represented in the catalogues solely by John Eliot Gardiner's EMI recording, made in Lyon in 1985 (now Warner/Erato, 6/85). Superb though it is, many would doubtless argue that a new version has long been overdue, though whether this DVD, filmed in Amsterdam in 2014, ideally fits the bill is debatable.

The work itself gazes whimsically at the arbitrary proscriptions of absolute monarchy and the inanities of political diplomacy. Chabrier's protagonist is the peddler Lazuli, in love with Laoula, the intended bride of the preposterous King Ouf. Ouf, like Gilbert & Sullivan's Mikado (the comparison is frequently drawn), has a penchant for staging public executions and has his eyes set on Lazuli as his next victim.



Boisterous and exuberant: Valer Sabadus and Kristina Hammarström offer considerable charms in Cavalli's *Il Giasone* from Geneva

Laoula, meanwhile, is travelling to Ouf's kingdom with the diplomat Hérisson de Porc-Épic, who, determined to conceal her identity at all costs, is passing her off as his wife, in blissful ignorance of the fact that his real spouse, Aloès, is having an affair with his secretary Tapioca. Ouf and Hérisson's plans farcically begin to unravel, however, when the bogus astrologer Siroco, to whom the king is in thrall, predicts that his life is mysteriously linked to that of Lazuli, and that the latter's death will inevitably result in Ouf's own.

The music is marvellous in its deft wit, lightness of touch and refined yet exquisite sensuality: Reynaldo Hahn described it as 'a rare jewel of French operetta, where the buffoonery and poetic verve of Offenbach are presented with all the musical charm, elegance and profusion the latter never sought'. Others have seen it as prefiguring Surrealism, which in turn forms the starting point for Pelly's absurdist staging, though he frequently misjudges the tone, setting it in a bleak modern city, where we find the king's subjects scuttling about in near darkness in fear for their lives as Christophe Mortagne's Ouf scours the streets in search of victims. His palace, when we reach it, is built of cogwheels and bits of clocks (appropriately enough for a

man who believes his time is running out), while his henchmen are sinister-looking anthropomorphic dogs. There are some fine moments: the Act 2 kissing quartet is cleverly (and sexily) done; and Mortagne and Jérôme Varnier's Siroco are hilarious in the famous duet about the restorative powers of green chartreuse. But much of it is simply far too heavyweight, its abrasive humour sitting uneasily with the score.

Musically it's strong, though. Stéphanie d'Oustrac makes a terrific Lazuli, impulsive and witty, wonderfully secure throughout the role's wide vocal range. Hélène Guilmette sounds ravishing in Laoula's 'Couplets de la rose', and her silvery soprano blends beautifully with d'Oustrac in their scenes together. Mortagne, an actor at the Comédie-Française as well as a singer, is hugely impressive as Ouf, while Julie Boulianne's elegant Aloès coolly plays Elliot Madore's prissy Hérisson and François Piolino's Tapioca off against each other: Piolino is an appealing tenor and you rather wish Chabrier had given him more to do. In the pit, meanwhile, Fournillier has all the grace and lightness of touch that the production sometimes lacks. It's well worth hearing, whatever you think of Pelly's staging. **Tim Ashley**

Gál

Das Lied der Nacht

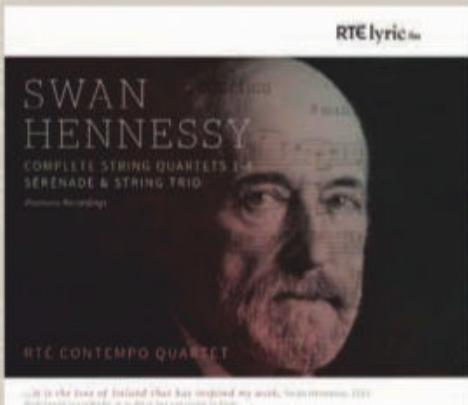
Lina Liu sop Lianora
Susann Vent-Wunderlich sop Hämone
Gritt Gnauck mez Princess-Abbess
Rhys Jenkins bar Tancred
Oliver Weidinger bass Chancellor
Ralph Ertel ten Ciullo/Nameless Singer
Chorus of Theater Osnabrück; Osnabrück
Symphony Orchestra / Andreas Hotz
CPO ② CPO555 186-2 (137' • DDD)
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



'One of the most powerful operatic experiences ever!' was how one critic described *Das Lied der Nacht* after its Breslau premiere in April 1926. The third of Hans Gál's four operas, it was hugely successful in Germany until 1933, when the Nazis banned his music, forcing him initially to return to his native Austria, then into eventual exile in the UK. *Das Lied der Nacht* was not heard again until 2017, when it was revived first in Osnabrück in a production by Mascha Pörzgen, then in concert by the Hans Gál Society in Edinburgh, where Gál lived from 1940

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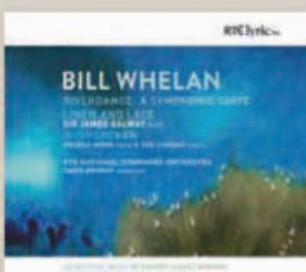


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until his death in 1987. This recording was made after the Osnabrück performances, albeit, it would seem, with a couple of cast changes.

It's a fascinating piece, though not everyone will unequivocally share the enthusiasm of its early reviewers. Setting an overwrought libretto by the openly gay Moravian poet Karl Michael von Levetzow, it deals with the catastrophic consequences of sexual repression in its depiction of the Sicilian princess Lianora, who is repeatedly aroused by the voice of an unknown man singing in the city streets at night but finds herself unable to cope with the corresponding reality when she discovers, by the cold light of day, that the Singer is, in fact, Ciullo, a common boatman, who takes his own life when she rejects him.

Levetzow's text, however, swamps the narrative in an unwieldy amalgam of Symbolist aesthetics and Freudian psychology that can impede the dramatic momentum. The night/day imagery from *Tristan* is pressed into relentless service to delineate conflicts and movements between unconscious desires and reason within the individual psyche, while the mechanics of repression are questionably equated with the strictures of organised religion, embodied in the frightful figure of Lianora's aunt, the Princess-Abbess. Lianora apart, the protagonists remain ciphers, and Ciullo's climactic suicide is unmoving since Levetzow never allows Gál to establish him as a character independent of Leonora's fantasies.

The end result is curiously disengaging, despite the excellence of much of the music. Mahler's influence is more than once apparent, appropriately enough for an opera in which the rapturous and the neurotic are in continual proximity. Lianora has a wonderful aria in the second scene, in which she waits in tremulous anticipation for the Singer to begin his song, and the duet that follows is terrifically sexy. Best of all, perhaps, is the music Gál provides for the implacable Princess-Abbess: her long scene with Lianora, dominated by slow ostinatos and immovable brass and woodwind chords, is both deeply creepy and superbly accomplished.

The performance is for the most part strong, though Ralph Ertel is occasionally taxed by the Singer's high tessitura and Rhys Jenkins as Lianora's womanising cousin Tancred sounds a bit too brutal. Lina Liu, however, is outstanding in her vivid delineation of Lianora's predicament, her bright, silvery tone nicely contrasted with the altogether warmer-sounding Susann Vent-Wunderlich as her

maidservant Hämone, who is very much the voice of reason within the work. The Princess-Abbess requires a grand singing actress and Gritt Gnauck, though at times unsteady, really generates the requisite menace. Conductor Andreas Hotz presses the score forwards with considerable urgency, all the while laying careful emphasis on the subtle yet telling use of counterpoint that is the hallmark of Gál's style. The playing and choral singing are exemplary. **Tim Ashley**

Gluck

Orphée et Euridice



Juan Diego Flórez ten *Orphée*
Christiane Karg sop *Euridice*
Fatma Said sop *Amour*
Chorus and Orchestra of La Scala, Milan / Michele Mariotti

Stage directors Hofesh Shechter, John Fulljames

Video director Tiziano Mancini

Belvedere (F) **DVD** BVE08052; (F) **Blu-ray Disc** BVE08053
 (129' • NTSC • 16.9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0, DD5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, March 14 & 17, 2018

Includes synopsis



On August 2, 1774, Gluck presented *Orphée et Euridice* at the Paris Opéra. It was an expanded version, now called a *tragédie opéra*, of *Orfeo ed Euridice*, the *azione teatrale* first seen in Vienna 12 years before. It followed the success of *Iphigénie en Aulide*, Gluck's first opera for Paris, in which the part of Achilles was taken by the *haute-contre* Joseph Legros, successor to the great Pierre de Jélyotte. Legros sang Orpheus, and went on to appear in Gluck's subsequent French operas. The opera was revised in 1859 by Berlioz for the contralto Pauline Viardot. That version, in French, drew on both the Vienna and the Paris scores. A composite version is still the norm, certainly on recordings; but this recording is pure Paris, with only the odd repeat omitted; meaning that, as well as the additional dances in Act 2, there are some 20 minutes of ballet after the final chorus (though when the orchestra has a repeat of that chorus, in this production the singers join in).

The stage directors are Hofesh Shechter and John Fulljames, and the choreography is performed by Shechter's own company. The orchestra is seated on a platform, initially above the stage, which is lowered to stage level and pit level as required. At the beginning of each act Orpheus is seen sitting in a pool of light. Sporting a rather

natty blue three-piece suit with matching belted overcoat, he soon strips down to waistcoat and tieless shirt. During the 'Pantomime' incorporated into the opening chorus, an outline in wicker of the dead Eurydice is set alight. This is repeated at the end, while Orpheus wanders off looking miserable. Much the same happens – without the pyrotechnics – in the staging of the Vienna version from Český Krumlov (ArtHaus Musik, 9/14). How this can be squared with Gluck's upbeat ending is anyone's guess.

The ballet is of course a far cry from what the Parisian audiences would have seen in 1774; the male dancers are often bare-chested, and the Chaconne ends in a display of jiving. Juan Diego Flórez may be no *haute-contre* but he delivers a memorable Orpheus, despairing and passionate.

Singing at today's higher pitch, he has no trouble with the tessitura. The bravura air 'L'espoir renaît dans mon âme' makes an exciting end to Act 1: whether it was by Gluck or not, Legros must have been thrilled with it. The other two characters have much less to do. Fatma Said, in a golden suit, sings brightly as Cupid, while Christiane Karg, in a ruched, ankle-length off-the-shoulder number, is properly stroppy when upbraiding Orpheus.

The orchestra is La Scala's own. When this production was premiered at Covent Garden in 2015 with Flórez, Amanda Forsythe and Lucy Crowe, John Eliot Gardiner conducted the Monteverdi Choir and the English Baroque Soloists; and it's a pity that it was not filmed at the time. Heaven knows, Gardiner can over-shape a phrase, but Michele Mariotti can't look at a cadence without introducing a massive rallentando. There's the end of the 'Pantomime', and each stanza of 'Objet de mon amour', and the dance following 'Cet asile aimable' – not to mention the return to the tonic in the 'Dance of the Blessed Spirits' or the modulation to the dominant in 'J'ai perdu mon Euridice'. But it's good to have a complete staged version of this masterpiece, which is so much more than just a revision of *Orfeo ed Euridice*.

Richard Lawrence

Heinichen

Flavio Crispo

Leandro Marziotte counterten Falvio Crispo
Dana Marbach sop Elena
Alessandra Visentin contr Fausta
Silke Gäng contr Imilee
Nina Bernsteiner sop Gilimero
Tobias Hunger ten Massiminiano
Ismael Arróniz bass Costantino
Il Gusto Barocco (Stuttgart Baroque Orchestra) / Jörg Halubek



Tosca as a thriller: Christian Thielemann directs Michael Sturminger's present-day production of Puccini's opera from the Salzburg Easter Festival

CPO ③ CPO555 111-2 (3h 17' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Concert Hall of the
Musikhochschule, Stuttgart, June 18, 2016
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Flavio Crispo
(1719/20) was
abandoned during
rehearsals.

According to the eyewitness Quantz, the castrato Senesino lost his temper, tore up a colleague's aria and threw it at the Dresden Kapellmeister's feet; this misconduct caused the king to cancel all the Italian singers' contracts – probably the outcome Senesino had contrived so that he could join the Royal Academy of Music and Handel in London. An almost complete manuscript score and a handwritten libretto are both preserved in the Sächsische Landesbibliothek. The missing music of the final chorus is reconstructed from one of Heinichen's concertos by Maxwell Sobel, whose edition is recorded by the Stuttgart ensemble Il Gusto Barocco.

The plot concerns amorous and political entanglements caused by the conflict between the third-century rival Roman emperors Constantine and Maximilian;

to make life complicated, Constantine's new wife Fausta (Maximilian's daughter) has the hots for her stepson Crispo, and so does the captive daughter of the king of Franconia. However, Crispo has instead fallen in love with the English princess Elena (who Maximilian's son Massenzio also desires, while resenting everyone in Rome that removed his family from power). It gets even more complicated.

Jörg Halubek's shaping of attractive arias is spot-on. Crispo's 'Basta à me luci adorate' is a gentle triple-time love song in which muted violins and violas play in unison, doubled by flutes, and over pizzicato basses – the hero's tender music is sung sensitively by Leandro Marziotto. Elena's 'Chi chiedesse all'augelletto' juxtaposes delicate pizzicato strings, rapturous obbligato flute and Dana Marbach's limpid singing; 'Io vorrei saper d'amore' is too breezy to convey Elena's desperation for death to end her plight but Heinichen's music, featuring an elaborate archlute solo, is wonderful. Imilee's 'Se tal sull'alme regni' is a Venetian-style aria with passages for noble horns in alternation with orchestral *tutti*s for strings doubled by flutes, the voice part doubled sweetly by violins and sung ardently by Silke Gäng. There is also a Vivaldian quality to

Costantino's hushed 'Bella pace, in più placide cure', its mingling of octave leaps and suave melodicism sung with grainy intimacy by Ismael Arróniz.

Notwithstanding Alessandra Visentin's feisty singing, the crucial role of Fausta is diminished by heavy cuts; even her vivid horn-laden vision of the Furies in response to her husband's brutal order that she is to be boiled to death in the baths ('Già dal profondo') is reduced to only its first section. Ten scenes are omitted entirely, skipping over almost every essential crisis in the plot. Elsewhere, recitative conversations between characters are often abridged to a sketchy minimum; an otherwise admirable recording has its theatrical coherence diluted to oblivion.

The scene in which the imprisoned Crispo drinks poison ('Vieni, o tosco') – which he does not know his friend Gilimero has swapped for a sleeping draught – is not on a par dramatically with the similar scene Senesino later sang in Handel's *Tolomeo* (1728); a sentimental triple-time lament featuring five-part muted strings (including pizzicato bass line, without harpsichord) is charming but the hero remains conscious long enough to sing an incongruously sunny love duet with Elena. On the other hand, Costantino's guilt at the apparent

death of his honourable son is a hauntingly restless G minor aria with contrapuntal tensions ('Vostre imagini noi non siamo'). Heinichen's opera emerges from its long neglect into an appreciative light, but the integrity of its text deserved better treatment. **David Vickers**

Puccini



Tosca

Anja Harteros sop.....Tosca
Aleksandrs Antonenko ten.....Cavaradossi
Ludovic Tézier bar.....Scarpia
Andrea Mastroni bass.....Angelotti
Mikeldi Atxalandabaso ten.....Spoletta
Matteo Peirone bass.....Sacristan
Rupert Grössinger bar.....Sciarrone
Levente Páll bass.....Gaoler
Salzburg Bach Choir; Staatskapelle Dresden / Christian Thielemann
Stage director Michael Sturminger
Video director Tiziano Mancini
C Major Entertainment (F) **DVD** 748308;
(F) 748404 (120' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)
 Recorded live at the Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg, March 21 & 24, April 2, 2018
 Includes synopsis



The first notes to sound in the Grosses Festspielhaus are gunshots and police sirens, a subterranean shootout in which a political prisoner is busted out of a carabinieri van. He climbs a spiral staircase, the set sinks and we're in a church as Christian Thielemann and the Staatskapelle Dresden unleash Scarpia's threatening opening chords. For yes, this is Puccini's *Tosca* as a thriller, directed for last year's Salzburg Easter Festival by Michael Sturminger. And for the most part it works very well, leading to a denouement which is, well, thrilling.

For an opera where the libretto states specific times and locations, *Tosca* takes to relocation remarkably well. The setting here is clearly the present day. There's a photograph of Pope Francis on the wall of the choirboys' dormitory at the start of Act 3. Cavaradossi's portrait of Mary Magdalene is a hideous modern sculpture which looks as if she's wrapped in tin foil. His lunch 'basket' is a plastic bag containing a bottle of San Pellegrino. Sturminger's modernisation extends to the subtitles: 'I saw a copper's mug in every face!' declares Angelotti. Was the libretto translated by an *EastEnders* scriptwriter?

The outstanding Anja Harteros is a chic Tosca in shades and slacks in Act 1, looking every inch a diva, while Ludovic Tézier's Scarpia is a white-haired mafia boss, creepily detaining one of the choirladies before the Te Deum – a stylised procession – then crossing himself and kissing his ring. Tezier's aristocratic baritone suits the suave *Godfather* scenario, his gesture to his henchman indicating Cavaradossi's going to receive an offer he can't refuse down in the baron's torture chamber. His Act 2 scene with Tosca is pure cat-and-mouse, both singers on vibrant form, even when Harteros is made to begin 'Vissi d'arte' lying across Scarpia's desk.

Aleksandrs Antonenko's Cavaradossi isn't quite in their class, rough and ready, but he sings lustily, from the heart. He scribbles 'E lucevan le stelle' on the back of an envelope from a nightclub rooftop – Il Divo, I kid you not – overlooking St Peter's. He clearly knows his number is up as he faces an execution squad chillingly drawn from choirboy volunteers. But what does this mean for Tosca? Sturminger has a neat twist up his sleeve, which I shan't spoil here.

Thielemann wouldn't necessarily be everyone's – anyone's? – idea of a natural Puccini conductor but there's a certain

plush symphonic grandeur to the Staatskapelle's playing which is highly persuasive. **Mark Pullinger**

Schoeck

Das Schloss Dürande

Robin Adams barRenald Dubois
Sophie Gordanadze sopGabriele
Uwe Stickert tenCount Armand
Hilke Andersen mezPriress
Andries Cloete tenOld Count
Jordan Shanahan barNicolas
Ludovica Bello sopCountess Morvaille
Chorus of Berne Konzert Theater; Berne Symphony Orchestra / Mario Venzago
Claves (M) 50-1902/4 (149' • DDD)
 Recorded live the Konzert Theater, Bern, June 2, 2018
 Includes synopsis and German libretto



One could be forgiven for not being familiar with Othmar Schoeck's 1943 opera *Das Schloss Dürande*, with a libretto loosely after Joseph von Eichendorff by a certain Hermann Burte. And that date offers a clue as to its somewhat tricky reception, taking on an important additional colour when one adds the place of the premiere: Berlin's Staatsoper.

This new recording is based on a major enterprise that aimed to tackle that disquieting detail head-on. As part of a large project outlined in an entire book, Francesco Micieli set out both, for want of a better word, to denazify Burte's libretto and to rid it of its worst offences against literature – to improve the quality of the verse and its content and bring it closer to Eichendorff, the two endeavours obviously closely linked to one another.

Claves's booklet includes an essay that explains much of the process, and shows us sample before-and-after verse. The

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resulting text strikes me as quietly effective and a good fit for the atmosphere of Schoeck's music. Another short note in the booklet comes from conductor Mario Venzago, responsible for making Micieli's revisions work viably with the score. This work, he says, is 'really Schoeck's magnum opus'.

There's certainly no doubting its seriousness: the music is economical and often haunting. The two outer acts, set at the titular castle, have something of the atmosphere of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. In Act 1 the light, piano-bejewelled orchestration also brings Strauss's *Ariadne* to mind. The music for the two lovers Armand and Gabriele is beguiling and touching (the roles are tenderly and engagingly sung by Uwe Stickert and Sophie Gordeladze).

Where the work seems less successful, however, is in its setting of the broader context – the impending French Revolution. A lot of additional characters come and go in a way that leaves the drama a little unfocused. Nevertheless, Gabriele's misguidedly vengeful brother (forcefully sung by Robin Adams) makes a strong impression, and Andries Cloete makes the most of the Old Count's final scene.

There's no doubting the commitment of Venzago and his forces, either, even though the live concert performance captured here has a couple of rough edges. But I have my doubts that, as the team behind it seem to hope, the work will re-establish itself in the repertory. It's a memorable piece, though; and, in its refined, lightly tonal musical language, a rewarding listen. In short: well worth hearing for anyone interested in Schoeck and music of this time. **Hugo Shirley**

R Thompson

The Mask in the Mirror

Cameo Humes ten Narrator/Paul Dunbar
Angela L Owens sop Alice Moore
Leberta Lorál sop Victoria/Woman in the bar
Lindsay Patterson Abdou sop Patsy Moore/
..... Ms Lyons/Mathilde Dunbar/Leila Moore
Natalie Mann sop Sarah
John Burt Polhamus bar William Dean Howells
Roland Mills ten Sales Representative/Drinking Buddy
Richard Thompson pf

The Sanaa Opera Project / Stephen Tucker

Navona  NV6209 (131' • DDD)

Includes libretto



Richard Thompson's chamber opera *The Mask in the Mirror* (2012) tells the story

of the relationship between Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906), the first African American poet of international standing, and Alice Ruth Moore (1875-1935), also a writer – but much less successful – and later his wife. Both were complex characters whose infatuation arose from lust, for the most part, in Dunbar's case, and hero worship of the poet (rather than the man) on the part of Moore. Thompson's treatment is sensitive and lyrical, drawing almost exclusively on their letters for his libretto. There are flashes of ragtime and jazz in the accompaniment, suggestive perhaps of the dialect nature of some early Dunbar poems, which brought him (ironically) the most attention. As the opera progresses and the relationship founders, these evocative touches become fewer.

The opera opens with a brooding, Brittenesque Prologue with the composer accompanying the two principals. It quickly develops with the chamber ensemble added as the initial courtship blooms. The critical moment for Dunbar's literary reputation occurs early on (Act 1 scene 2) with the career-changing review in *Harper's Weekly*; looked at with 21st-century sensitivities it makes uncomfortable reading. Less savoury aspects emerge of both characters: Dunbar's womanising and ultimate dependence on his mother – related by his bitter former amour, Victoria – and Alice's own anti-African American racism, in the heated exchange with Ms Lyons, the first of four roles sung with flexible virtuosity by Lindsay Patterson Abdou.

Act 1 closes with Paul in London, in an abortive relationship with Sarah (a nice vignette from Natalie Mann), drinking heavily to cope with tuberculosis. Act 2 follows his self-destructiveness, culminating with his drunken rape of Alice, who yet, in its final scene, resolves to marry Paul to establish themselves as a literary couple. In the briefer third act, incompatibility, illness and the baleful appearance of Paul's mother, Mathilde (Lindsay Abdou again), result in separation; Dunbar died aged 33.

The cast are uniformly good and Stephen Tucker draws out some fine playing from The Sanaa Opera Project ensemble. Cameo Humes provides a strong portrait of the poet – too much so, perhaps, in Dunbar's frazier scenes – but Angela Owens has more depth as Alice. There is too much reliance on recitative-style vocal lines, a common feature of modern opera, and too much for soprano; the opera needs a couple of strong alto roles. Nonetheless, *The Mask in the Mirror* is a haunting work that much repays attention. Navona's recording is clear if a little airless.

Guy Rickards

Verdi

I Lombardi alla prima crociata

León de la Guardia ten Arvino
Pavel Kudinov bass-bar Pagano
Anna Werle mez Viclinda
Ania Jeruc sop Giselda
Daniel Dropulja bass-bar Pirro
Christoph Wittmann ten Prior of Milan
Andrew Nolen bass Acciano
Marian Talaba ten Oronte
Kate Allen mez Sofia
Czech Philharmonic Choir, Brno;
Cappella Aquileia / Marcus Bosch
Coviello  COV91901 (110' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Festspielhaus Congress
Centrum, Heidenheim, Germany, July 15-20, 2018
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Recorded at last year's Heidenheim Festival, this audio-only version of

Verdi's fourth opera comes hard on the heels of Michele Mariotti's Turin performance, released both on disc and DVD by Dynamic late last year. Reviewing the latter in February's *Gramophone*, Richard Lawrence discussed the musical unevenness and dramatic flaws that have hindered the work's wide acceptance, to which Uwe Schweikert's booklet note for the new set, often unsparing in its criticism, adds concerns that the opera's 'falsification of the historical crimes' of the first Crusade, in particular the massacre in 1099 of the Arab and Jewish population defending Jerusalem, can nowadays 'only be recognised by audiences with a certain degree of unease'.

Both the work's admirers and detractors would acknowledge that it sprawls somewhat; and in what one assumes is a quest for greater dramatic tautness, the Heidenheim performance cuts some 30 minutes from the score. Mostly this is a question of jettisoning repeats, either within numbers or of cabalettas, though the Act 4 battle music has also been trimmed. In the process, however, an unwieldy work has been to some extent further unbalanced. The Act 1 quintet, for instance, loses much of its clout when both its imposing slow section and exhilarating stretta have been shortened. And the cuts don't, I'm afraid, iron out the much-discussed narrative implausibilities and inconsistencies for a second.

It's decently sung, though, and sometimes much more than that. Both tenors, León de la Guardia as Arvino and Marian Talaba as Oronte, can be effortful: Talaba makes heavy weather of his Act 2



León de la Guardia and Anna Werle bring vivid characterisation to Verdi's *I Lombardi* at the Heidenheim Opera Festival

aria but settles as the performance progresses, and de la Guardia compensates for his occasional moments of strain with a notably vivid characterisation. Ania Jeruc is a fine Giselda, floating her 'Salve Maria' with superb poise, yet possessing enough heft and dramatic fire to make a real impression in her big Act 2 cabaletta, of which she is mercifully permitted to sing the repeat. Pavel Kudinov, meanwhile, warm of tone and strikingly intense, admirably captures Pagano's agonies of conscience and yearning for salvation. The choral singing is consistently beautiful – 'Jerusalem ... Jerusalem ...' at the start of Act 3 is very much a high point – as is the Cappella Aquileia's playing for Marcus Bosch, though there are times when he could propel the score forwards with more urgency. The cuts make it difficult to recommend, though, and it's by no means a first choice for the work itself, of which Gardelli's RPO recording remains very much the benchmark. **Tim Ashley**

Selected comparison:
Gardelli (5/72^R, 11/89^R) (DECC) 478 5313 DMO2

'Mozart'

Martin y Soler Il burbero di buon cuore – Infelice ad ogni istante **Mozart** Chi sa, chi sa, qual sià, K582. La clemenza di Tito – Non più di fiori. Don Giovanni – Or sai chi l'onore. Die Entführung aus dem Serail – Martern aller Arten; Welcher

Wechsel herrscht in meiner Seele ... Traurigkeit ward mir zum Lose. Le nozze di Figaro – E Susanna non vien! ... Dove sono i bei momenti. Vado, ma dove?, K583 **Paisiello** Il barbiere di Siviglia – Giusto ciel, che conoscete **Traetta** Antigona – Finito è il mio tormento; Io resto sempre a piangere; Ombra cara, amorosa
Olga Peretyatko sop
Basel Symphony Orchestra / Ivor Bolton
Sony Classical ⑤ 19075 91905-2 (60' • DDD)
includes texts and translations



There's a neat concept behind Olga Peretyatko's new disc: putting familiar Mozart arias in context by programming them alongside his less familiar contemporaries. Hence Tommaso Traetta's *Antigona* (1772), Giovanni Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1782) and Martín y Soler's *Il burbero di buon cuore* (1786) rub shoulders with arias from *Entführung*, *Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *La clemenza di Tito*.

Traetta's *Antigona* was written for the St Petersburg court. From the three short arias here, there are hints of Gluck, especially in the opening lament 'Ombra cara', which Peretyatko sings tenderly, while she eats up the coloratura in 'Finito

è il mio tormento'. In its day, Paisiello's *Barbiere* was extremely successful ... until Rossini's version usurped it. Rosina's gentle cavatina in which she pleads with heaven for her soul to be granted peace is far from Rossini's minx. *Il burbero di buon cuore* ('The Good-hearted Curmudgeon') is the most interesting inclusion here. Soler's aria is pretty plain but Peretyatko also programmes two insertion arias Mozart composed for it three years after its premiere, possibly written for Caterina Cavalieri, for whom he'd already composed the role of Konstanze in *Entführung*. While not up to the considerable challenges of 'Martern aller Arten', both these insertion arias cover a wide range and are worth hearing.

Throughout, Peretyatko sings with good taste, vocal lines executed cleanly, although some of this repertoire can seem a little heavy for what is, essentially, a coloratura instrument that can dazzle in Rossini and Donizetti. She rises well to the considerable challenges of 'Martern aller Arten' but Donna Anna and the Countess can sound a bit of a stretch for a soprano better suited (at present) to Zerlina and Susanna. Ivor Bolton gets efficient playing from the Sinfonieorchester Basel. An enjoyable disc for uncovering some classical rarities.
Mark Pullinger

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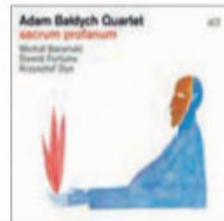
The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Adam Bałdych Quartet

Sacrum Profanum

ACT (F) 9883-2



This is Bałdych's sixth album for ACT, and his first for the label with his fellow Polish musicians. Reflecting his dual love of classical and jazz, he has turned to the repertoire of sacred music for *Sacrum Profanum* and the compositions of Thomas Tallis, Hildegard of Bingen, Sofia Gubaidulina, Gregorio Allegri plus a hymn from the 13th century by an unknown writer. With four Bałdych originals that sustain a similar mood, this music may be sombre, but it's also moving and often profound. By going where most men would fear to tread they succeed in vibrating these timeless compositions with contemporary meaning. Using a renaissance violin, the

gran cassia, gongs, chorales, and a prepared piano according to tone and context, Bałdych and his quartet create music rich in tonal colour, while Bałdych and Dys have got inside the material at hand and construct their improvisations around the needs of the compositional material, remaining true to the composer's original melodic intent.

Stuart Nicholson

The Comet Is Coming

Trust In The Lifeforce Of The Deep Mystery

Impulse! (F) 7737755



The Comet Is Coming's name contains apocalypse and a sense of human proportion in the cosmos, diving into religious and scientific concepts of end-times and rebirth. This second album confirms UK jazz's pop culture resurrection while they're at it.

Updating spiritual jazz for a sci-fi age, Dan Leavers' east London studio was fully utilised in his and Max Hallett's flowing, precise production. But though *Blade Runner*'s soundtrack sometimes inspires Leavers' synth glides, this is human, not cyborg, music. Big bang-expansive, relentless and restless, with Hutchings' sax an attacking, integrated element in a bigger sonic picture, it could be played at a rave or place of worship, festival field or urban club. The dance-floor transcendence of 'Super Zodiac' features some of Hutchings' most exciting playing, his dancer's feint into its final climactic seconds sending the whole album over the edge. Offering off-beat grime accents elsewhere, Hallett is the Elvin Jones-like energy core of 'The Universe Wakes Up' as Hutchings ascends, untroubled, cruising between modal hyperspeed and free rawness, Coltrane rising into view like a lost star. **Nick Hasted**

World Music

Leveret

Diversions

RootBeat Records (F) RBRCD42



Leveret's fourth album returns to the traditional tune repertoire of their debut – if radically remade in the hands of three English master musicians: Sam Sweeney (fiddle), Rob Harbron (English concertina) and Andy Cutting (melodeon). Once again drawing from the riches of Playford's *The Dancing Master*, as well as from sources including Snowhill Manor in Gloucestershire ('The Honey Moon'), the papers of John Clare ('The Wounded Huzzar') and Somerset fiddler/shoemaker William Winter ('Molly Apple Pye', 'The Bull Ring / The Lady's Bright Knot').

The 'Wounded Huzzar' is an extraordinarily beautiful and stately tune,

with the concertina and fiddle taking turns at the front, while all three surge and sway as one through 'Molly Apple Pye'. Hearing them live, often in intimate settings, is a close kin to hearing them on record. That same sense of the sound in a room, of impulse, taste and expertise guiding them through these often long-dormant tunes raised to beautiful life again from the sheet music. **Tim Cumming**

Kronos Quartet and Mahsa & Marjan Vahdat

Placeless

KKV (F) FXCD457



Given the track record of Kronos Quartet and Iranian singers Mahsa & Marjan Vahdat, it's not surprising that this is a powerful and arresting disc. It's also part of

a bigger Kronos Quartet plan to highlight music from the seven Muslim-majority nations affected by president Trump's US travel ban.

Most of the 14 songs are sung solo by one of the sisters, but three are sung together. It's lovely the way their voices take over from each other in 'The Sun Rises'. Needless to say, with just the four stringed instruments and solo voices the textures are clear and transparent. Sometimes, as in the previous example, the quartet creates an acoustic backdrop for the singers. While in 'My Ruthless Companion' the strings create a lively harmonic and rhythmic background and in 'Leyli's Nightingales' they evoke the birds. The recording was made in Oslo's Kulturkirken Jakob and there's a rich, sonorous bloom to the sound. This is one of Kronos' best collaborations and that's saying something. **Simon Broughton**

Songlines

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Wilhelm Furtwängler in Berlin

The Berlin Philharmonic raids its archive and **Peter Quantrill** weighs up the treasure

Do you want this box? Yes, you do. Is it worth it? Again, yes, almost certainly, it is.

Diehard Furtwängler partisans hardly need to know more. But why should anyone else spend over £200 on surviving, already widely available excerpts from 21 broadcast concerts in variably overloaded mono sound?

Because, for one thing, these are the recordings that have come, more than any other, to define this conductor's identity, and his legacy. As someone never fully at ease working under studio conditions, Furtwängler came to make recordings quite late in his career. In 1926 he was 41 years old, with a professional career of more than two decades' standing behind him, when he conducted the Berlin Philharmonic in Beethoven's Fifth (reviewed in March 1927, without once mentioning the conductor by name). Emphatic and rhythmically straightforward, this first of 13 extant accounts neither generates the electricity of earlier recordings by Arthur Nikisch and Landon Ronald, nor yet adequately represents how he made the symphony go when unconfined by conducting it in four-minute chunks. With its much wider dynamic range, the 1937 remake issued by HMV (and faithfully transferred in 1996 by Lowell Cross for Music & Arts) more fully conveys the peculiarly dense BPO sonority and the conductor's instrumental voicing.

But it's only with the live broadcast from a Berlin Radio studio in September 1939 that we hear Furtwängler uncaged, if you like: less precise in attack than the NBC recording conducted by Toscanini two months later, but in which the *Andante con moto* is moulded into a series of waves each more powerful than the last, at once overriding the underlying march rhythm and yet rooting it in the same metrical scheme as the following Scherzo. Here are the qualities of 'Urlinie' (underlying melody)

and 'Fernhören' (literally, hearing from a distance) that Furtwängler learnt from the theories of Friedrich Schenker and the realisation of which in turn prompted Schenker (and others) to set the conductor apart from his peers as a supreme recreative artist.

The 1939 Fifth was recorded on eight single-sided shellac discs, of which the seventh was lost. The transfer on Tahra fills in the missing side with material from 1937, whereas the team of engineers working for the Berlin Philharmonic on the new box has opted to give us what's left of the performance, no more, no less.

It is this sense of struggle which surely lends many of his wartime performances their unnerving intensity

By then Germany was at war, and the degree to which circumstances influence both performance and each listener's perception of it is a matter of pure conjecture. The 1937 recording in particular establishes a blueprint for Furtwängler's vision of the symphony that undergoes no radical transformation in any of the 11 subsequent performances left to us.

And yet: shortly before his retirement in 2014, the late Michael Gielen conducted Mahler's Sixth Symphony at the Salzburg Festival, with the Baden-Baden radio orchestra that had lately been served with a termination notice. He remarked at the time that 'Crisis also stimulates. One struggles to sustain what one has created.' It is this sense of struggle – a word that recurs time and again in Furtwängler's own writing – which surely lends many of his wartime performances their unnerving intensity.

Presentation and marketing also play their parts in perception, and it would be idle to pretend otherwise. Editorial and design between them paint the most sober

yet vivid portrait of Berlin at war, and the orchestra too, from beautifully printed imagery of the bombed-out Philharmonie to concert posters, letters, photographs of musicians and broadcast engineers at work, and reproductions of the tape cases which illustrate the tortuous tale of where these recordings came from.

As meticulously outlined by the booklet essays, the first two concerts were preserved on shellac discs, of which original copies have been sourced in Germany and newly remastered. The remaining 19 concerts, or portions of them, were carefully mixed for broadcast by a team of Reichsrundfunk engineers including Friedrich Schnapp, whose recorded recollections – at least most of them – conclude the set: the French Furtwängler Society (SWF) has previously issued a longer version of the interview.

After the war, many of the original tapes ended up in the care of Moscow Radio. This is how some of them were first released in Europe, as more or less decently transferred Melodiya LPs. The generous baritone of Tibor de Machula came over loud and clear as the soloist in Schumann's Cello Concerto, but the grooves bit and spat at the climaxes of Bruckner's Fifth from the same concert. Around the same time, DG released LPs of a few tapes left behind in Germany, such as Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto with Conrad Hansen, but the results were, if anything, even dimmer. With the advent of glasnost the Moscow tapes began to trickle back to Berlin, though some of them arrived as copies.

The difference between copy and original (scrupulously outlined by the tracklisting) is laid bare by perhaps the most renowned single performance in the box, of Beethoven's Ninth from March 1942. This has been transferred from original tapes except for the Scherzo – from a copy – which duly sounds as though



Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting the Berliner Philharmoniker in the old Philharmonie

it was recorded in a different and more distant acoustic. In an ever more crowded market, the SWF transfer was until recently regarded as the best yet, but there is a quite startling roundness and richness to the new remastering that handles even the apocalyptic climax of the first movement (where Furtwängler always used two timpanists). Comparable to Andrew Rose's work on Pristine Classical, there is the uncanny suggestion – illusion would be too strong a word – of a soundstage with a definite centre, a kind of 'wide mono', without pulling artefacts into distinct channels in the manner of the 'fake stereo' of the 1960s. The level of intervention here isn't made clear, or not as clear as the 'Callas Remastered' transfers undertaken by Abbey Road Studios for Warner Classics in 2014, but it isn't as radical as some Pristine releases.

The audio restoration does wonders for the piano concertos in particular, filling out piano tone and sharpening up high and low registers. The transfers of Hansen's Beethoven and Adrian Aeschbacher's Brahms B flat Concerto are as good as new performances, by no means shallow compared to Edwin Fischer's performances (of the same Brahms and Furtwängler's own, prolix Symphonic Concerto). Only Walter

Giesecking's Schumann still disappoints, with the conductor's contribution equally (and uncharacteristically) disengaged as his soloist's. Meanwhile the coughing throughout Hansen's sublime prolongation of the Fourth Concerto slow movement's coda is still present, and so is an odd clicking at 1'40"-1'50" of the Schumann finale.

From the same concert as the Schumann, however, comes a Beethoven Seventh that burns with the kind of fury so impotently expressed by Furtwängler in his diaries. The speed of the finale is pretty much identical to when the orchestra played it last summer under their new chief conductor, Kirill Petrenko, but Dionysiac fury is played out through tragedy, as it is in Schubert's *Great C major*. In Strauss's *Don Juan* and the *Tristan* Prelude and Liebestod, Eros is put to the service of the same muse. Even the openers to *Der Freischütz* and *Die Meistersinger* contrive, without perversion, to rage with joy. In the unequivocal tragedies of Beethoven's *Coriolan*, the Fourth Symphony of Brahms and the Ninth of Bruckner every phrase sounds as if scored into the manuscript paper with the blackest Indian ink.

The tracklisting also lays out, in ghostly, grey type, what we have lost from several of the concerts. Much of it is new music,

composed by Philipp Jarnach, Paul Höffer and Gerhard Frommel, of the kind Furtwängler tended to promote as an act of resistance to the new orthodoxies of Schoenberg and Stravinsky. As the examples of Ernst Pepping's Second Symphony and Heinz Schubert's *Hymnisches Konzert* demonstrate at some length, it was a style condemned to obscurity by its own anachronistic worthiness, and Furtwängler entertained similar (justified) fears about his own music.

However, what survives of these concerts comes down more to the hand of fate than the capricious aesthetics of any radio producer. A Mozart Symphony No 40 is missing, a Brahms Second, more Fifths and Sevenths of Beethoven. More grievous is the loss of the first movement to a Bruckner Sixth fired with nervous, Schubertian energy even in the funeral march of its slow movement. One notable act of restoration comes with the penultimate concert, and a now complete (not completed!) *Unfinished Symphony*.

But inevitably, before the interview with Schnapp, the musical climax of the box arrives with the finale of Brahms's First Symphony, recorded in the cavernous Admiralspalast on January 23, 1945, before Furtwängler fled to Switzerland. Were I asked for a single recording to show 'why conducting matters', I would choose this Brahms performance, a bloody torso as it is. The canard that Furtwängler could not secure an exact, unanimous attack is rendered more baseless than ever by the new remastering.

Another canard is dispatched by archival material that shows how concerned the conductor was with the fidelity of these live recordings, and by their contribution to his legacy. 'It never comes out on the radio the same way I conduct it,' he complained to the long-suffering Schnapp, who concludes that 'he never agreed with the cultural policy of the Nazis ... He was human – what can I say?' Were not idea and execution so perfectly aligned, so often, in the performances so reverently enhanced by this box, there would be no need for anyone to take sides over Furtwängler's own degree of political alignment. History wouldn't care. He'd be another Nazi stooge, another useful idiot, or not. But these are the concerts that, so they said later, made life worth living for many Berliners. They matter. G

THE RECORDING

Wilhelm Furtwängler: The Radio Recordings 1939-1945

Berliner Philharmoniker (22 discs)
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Leonard Pennario: the RCA legacy

Jeremy Nicholas returns to some favourite recordings from his youth, and is still in awe

The pianist Leonard Pennario has never been ranked with the all-time greats. He died in 2008 but never achieved the same celebrity as his much shorter-lived American contemporaries William Kapell (b1922) and Julius Katchen (b1926). But Pennario (b1924) was nevertheless one of the most brilliant pianists of his generation. He left an enormous discography (over 60 LPs), most of them for the Capitol label, and was the first pianist, after the composer, to record all five of Rachmaninov's works for piano and orchestra. He was invited to replace Arthur Rubinstein, no less, in the so-called 'Million-Dollar Trio' with Jascha Heifetz and Gregor Piatigorsky. Oh yes, Pennario was quite a player.

You might wonder, as I have done, listening to this valuable and welcome collection why he is not better known. Might it be because of his dalliance with crossover repertoire? Discs of Gottschalk and arrangements for piano and orchestra of things like *Liebestraum* No 3 with the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra (neither, alas, included here, being on other labels) were reason enough to raise the eyebrows of sniffer commentators, to say nothing of *Midnight on the Cliffs*, composed when he 18, as ripe a piece of over-the-top pianistic campery as you'll hear.

His 12 LPs for RCA are presented in the now familiar format of their miniature originals with correspondingly microscopic sleeve notes on the rear covers. I began with Disc 2 purely because it was the first Pennario LP I ever bought. It was entitled 'Virtuoso Favourites', my eye having been caught by the first track: the *Emperor* Waltz arranged by Pennario, a Strauss transcription the equal of anything by Tausig, Rosenthal or Dohnányi. There's a genuinely witty Polka from Shostakovich's *The Age of Gold*, a barnstorming Ravel *La valse* and one of the most thrilling Gounod-Liszt *Faust* Waltzes on disc (and with a cut of only a few bars, for once). Indeed, a notable characteristic of Pennario's playing is his extraordinary articulation at extreme speed.

Arguably, the two Rachmaninov transcriptions do not have the same light touch as Moiseiwitsch and the composer, but as an example of transcendent technique and breathtaking



Has the time come for Leonard Pennario to be counted among the greats?

clarity – Horowitz without the neurosis – this particular album is hard to beat.

It is slightly more interesting than the one entitled 'Humoresques', a collection of popular short works (*Für Elise* and Dvořák's *Humoresque* among them) most of which sound as if played at the behest of the label rather than from pianistic

A notable characteristic of Pennario's playing is his extraordinary articulation at extreme speed

conviction. But then turn to the two discs of Debussy *Préludes* (both albeit on the short side at 35'15" and 36'18" respectively) and the reverse is true. I found these quite enchanting – surprisingly intimate, unaffected (perhaps too straightforward for some tastes) with highlights including a 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' of beguiling simplicity and a memorably brilliant account of 'Feux d'artifice'.

As to the piano and orchestra discs, CD1 has a fizzing version of the *Paganini* Rhapsody (a Pennario speciality) with Arthur Fielder and the Boston Pops at the height of their fame, and the top of

their game, in 1963, followed – the other side of the LP – by Franck's *Symphonic Variations* and Litolff's *Scherzo*. There are the two Liszt concertos with the LSO, Rachmaninov's First and Fourth concertos (truly outstanding) under André Previn with the RPO (1964) and back to the LSO a year later for the Schumann concerto and Richard Strauss's *Burleske* under Seiji Ozawa.

These are all fine, each one deserving a near-the-top place in anyone's collection, but of surpassing interest are the four discs of chamber music with Piatigorsky and Heifetz. How Pennario viewed his billing on the front covers of the LPs I do not know but many artists would surely consider it a personal affront (rather gratifyingly, the size of the font is reversed on these CDs in the pianist's favour). More significantly, Pennario's place in the sound picture reflects his place

in the pecking order. In the opening page of the Mendelssohn Cello Sonata with Piatigorsky, for instance, the cello is so upfront you simply can't tell what the piano is doing (a favourite recording with Feuerman and Rupp, even though from 1939, is far clearer). However, the balance is improved in the Strauss Sonata made nearly a year later (1966). It's a shame because this is a compelling partnership, Piatigorsky playing the Mendelssohn with his characteristic magisterial projection. Again, in the six trios by Mendelssohn, Dvořák, Arensky, Turina, Beethoven and Brahms, and the Franck Piano Quintet (few of which have been out of the catalogue for long since they were first released) one could hardly complain about the quality of music-making, yet in every one I would wish for the piano to be more forwardly placed.

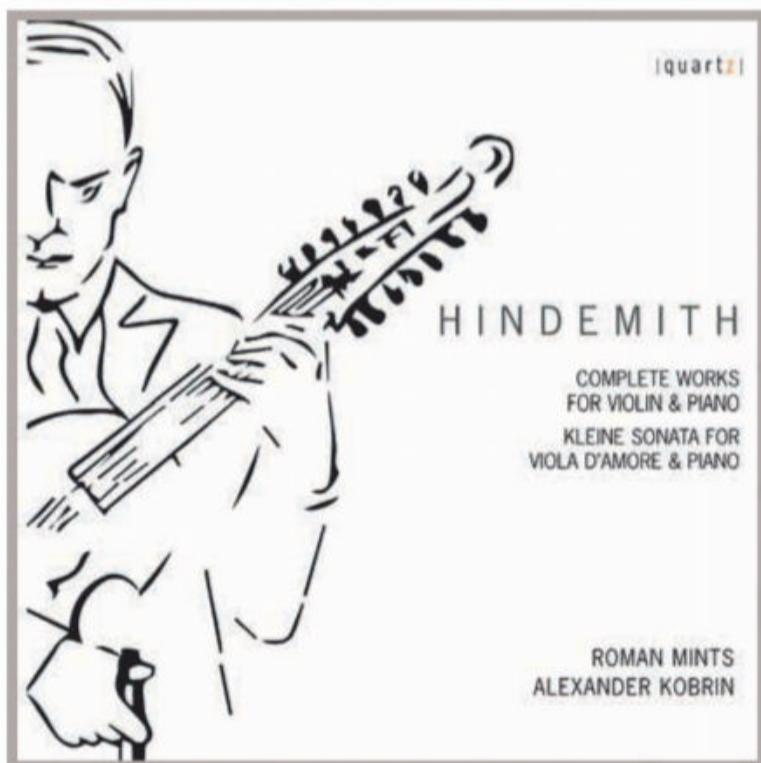
Too self-effacing for stardom? Too modest for his own good? Moot points, but Leonard Pennario demands to be heard, reassessed and, on this evidence alone, admitted to the piano Hall of Fame. **G**

THE RECORDING

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BOX-SET Round-up

Rob Cowan offers a personal round-up of some worthwhile CD bargains

Brilliant Classics is well known for its comprehensive bargain overviews of great composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, Fauré, Handel, Telemann, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich and Mendelssohn, for example, all handsomely represented, often involving distinctive performances, some of them 'historic'. Latest to arrive is **César Franck** and if, like me, you stand to learn from investigating works like *The Seven Last Words*, the opera *Stradella* and the Mass 'a 3 voix' (the *Agnus Dei* clearly anticipates Fauré's Requiem) then this 'César Franck Edition' should prove something of a revelation. Most of the material is licensed from other companies, the Naxos Music Group primarily, and there are some fine performances. Roberto Benzi directs the Arnhem Philharmonic in notably Wagnerian accounts of the D minor Symphony, *Les Éolides*, the *Symphonic Variations* and *Les Djinns*, the latter two with pianist François-Joël Thiollier (an excellent player) whereas as it falls to the equally adept Martijn van den Hoek to offer us the teenage Franck's Second Piano Concerto of 1835. *Les Béatitudes* is presented in Helmut Rilling's 1990 Hänssler Classics; Jean Fournet conducts *Rédemption* (a notable recording from 1976) and there are numerous organ, piano and even harmonium works including two versions of the *Prélude, Fugue et Variation*, Op 18, for organ and for piano solo arranged by Harold Bauer. We're also offered the Violin Sonata both as originally composed and in its cello incarnation as arranged by Jules Delsart. Essential I'd say for all Franckophiles who seek out the rarer byways of the master's output.

Another valuable collection arrives via Hänssler Profil and combines recordings by **Van Cliburn** that have already been boxed by RCA Red Seal and Melodiya. Two performances of Brahms B flat Concerto are included, one (RCA) with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony, the other with Kyrill Kondrashin and the Moscow Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra. Both are compelling but the sheer turbulence of Kondrashin's conducting inclines me to his version. We're also given alternative readings of Tchaikovsky's First Concerto, both under



Kondrashin this time, one from Moscow, the other from New York, as well as Moscow-recorded Beethoven, Chopin and Liszt, a London recital (including Prokofiev's Sixth Sonata) and other celebrated American concerto recordings. For me though the live performances win hands down every time: this is Van Cliburn well and truly off the leash, a force to reckon with, and it's great to have a selection of them available at such a reasonable price point.

A Documents collection devoted to the violinist **Isaac Stern** features tried-and-tested stereo/mono favourites such as the

Jonathan Nott offers a weighty, impactful Rite of Spring (the closing wallop will knock your socks off)

Bruch First and Mendelssohn Concertos and the Lalo *Symphonie espagnole* under Eugene Ormandy, the Sibelius and Brahms Concertos with Sir Thomas Beecham, the Beethoven and Berg Concertos where Leonard Bernstein conducts and the first two Mozart concertos under George Szell, as well as major recordings involving Pablo Casals (Mozart *Sinfonia concertante* K364 and Schubert Quintet) and other more 'historic' documents, some of them live. Stern's sturdy, muscular playing has a strongly beating heart at its core, even when occasionally fallible. A Bartók Second Concerto with the Suisse Romande Orchestra under Ernest Ansermet is especially memorable.

As it happens, Pentatone's centenary celebration of the **Suisse Romande Orchestra** includes a gritty, no-holds-barred 1961 account of Bartók's First Concerto where Stern joins forces with conductor Paul Kletzki. As with the Second Concerto I'd rate this live performance higher than Stern's already compelling studio recording. Ansermet is represented by the dramatic legend *Les Armaillis* by

Gustave Doret, a pupil of Joachim and Massenet who employs an appealing if fairly conservative musical language. The performance, from 1943, is one of three

that Ansermet conducted in memory of the composer (a one-time rival), who had just died. This rewarding collection honours various Suisse Romande reigning maestros, the latest being Jonathan Nott who offers a weighty, impactful *Rite of Spring* (the closing wallop will knock your socks off). Wolfgang Sawallisch conducts a restless Scbumann *Manfred* Overture, Ligeti's star-studded *Melodien* and an insightful, texture-conscious reading of Ansermet's *Pelléas*-like orchestrations of Debussy's *Six épigraphes antiques*. Horst Stein releases the very different characters of Ravel's *Shéhérazade* (with the soprano Marilyn Richardson), Stravinsky's *Les Noces* and Bernd Alois Zimmermann's engrossing *Photoptosis* with its plethora of musical quotations. Armin Jordan offers a superb *Daphnis* Second Suite, Dukas's atmospheric *Polyeucte* concert overture and Heinz Holliger's Weberian *Five Songs after Trakl* (with Cornelia Kallisch). And from the hugely gifted Fabio Luisi we have Berg's *Passacaglia* (1913) and Richard Strauss's *Don Juan*, while it falls to Neeme Järvi to deliver a darkly dramatic account of Rachmaninov's *Isle of the Dead*, Marek Janowski to bring out the fun and variety inherent in Blacher's *Variations for Orchestra on a Theme by Paganini* and the worthy Pinchas Steinberg to offer vital, generally well played accounts of orchestral showpieces by Wagner, Strauss and Lalo. All in all, this 'One Century of Music' does the Suisse Romande Orchestra proud so here's to the next century and parallel levels of excellence. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

César Franck Edition

Brilliant Classics (S) (23 discs) 95793BR

Van Cliburn: An American Wins in Russia

Hänssler Profil (S) (10) PH18080

Isaac Stern: Milestones of a Legend - The Greatest Violin Concertos

Documents (S) (10) 600491

1918-2018 One Century of Music

Suisse Romande Orchestra

Pentatone (M) (5) PTC5186791

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Master conductors in Moscow and Leningrad

You might say that comparing the Soviet conductors **Kyrill Kondrashin** and Yevgeny Mravinsky finds a rough parallel in the differences between Toscanini and George Szell, in other words impassioned drama and singing lines as opposed to relative coolness and gleaming virtuosity. Both Russians have featured on Profil's most recent release sheets, Kondrashin with a 13-CD set of recordings that date from between 1937 and 1963. Most important, historically speaking, is the Moscow world premiere of the original 1962 version of Shostakovich's Symphony No 13 (with the bass Vitaly Gromadsky), using Yevtushenko's text commemorating the massacre of Jews at Babi Yar, whereas the revised version focuses on the Soviet people as a whole, which in reality included, as well as Jews, prisoners of war, communists, Ukrainian nationalists and Roma. But the first and best-documented of the massacres took place in September 1941, killing

Exciting, but you miss the antiphonal spread of a decent stereo recording

approximately 33,771 Jews. That was Yevtushenko's original subject (ie the line 'I feel myself a Jew'), one that the anti-Semitic Soviet government would have no truck with. So it's significant that this edition of the symphony is once again made generally available, especially as presented in such a memorably intense performance.

The earliest recording included here is a dynamic account of Smetana's *Bartered Bride* Overture where Kondrashin conducts the Orchestra of Mikhailovsky Opera Theatre and which tails a complete 1949 performance of the opera, in Russian, from the Bolshoi with the great tenor Georgi Nelepp singing the role of Jeník. Kondrashin's conducting here is often nicely pointed (in the 'Polka', for example) or brilliant (a stunning 'Dance of the Comedians'). Good sampling points as

far as the singing is concerned are the duets between Jeník and Marenka (Elena Shumilova) in Act 3. As to the rest, Tchaikovsky is represented by a fine stereo (1959) Moscow Philharmonic *Pathétique* Symphony and, from three years later, also with the Moscow Philharmonic, a superb account of the Third Orchestral Suite. A lustrous Serenade for Strings with the Staatskapelle Dresden scrubs up nicely and there are compelling versions of the First Piano Concerto (with Emil Gilels) and Violin Concerto (with David Oistrakh). Oistrakh is also represented with concertos by Weinberg and Stravinsky as well as Taneyev's *Suite de Concert* and Ravel's *Tzigane*, while it falls to Leonid Kogan to offer a humbling account of Shostakovich's First Concerto. Ravel's G major Concerto with Yakov Zak, though undeniably exciting, is a bit of a mess but the Left-Hand Concerto with Gilels – here sounding better than on other editions I've heard – is magnificent. Sundry worthwhile items are also featured and, viewed overall, I would grant this set an enthusiastic thumbs up.

The fourth volume of Profil's **Yevgeny Mravinsky Edition** includes, in addition to numerous great performances, some fascinating curios. Praga has already released a version of Sibelius's Third Symphony said to date from October 23, 1963 (11/16). The version included here, very similar if not the same, is quoted as dating from October 27. But, as I said when covering the earlier version, come the finale, at the point where divided muted triplets on violins at the *più allegro* passage fall from the woodwind phrases like snowflakes, something very odd happens: they are entirely missing, not the sort of 'detail' you would have expected the perfectionist, über-autocrat Mravinsky to let slip. So why has this recording been kept so securely under wraps? Or could this perhaps be a rehearsal? Even more bizarre is a live performance of Shostakovich's Eleventh said to date from November 3, 1955 – two years before the work was actually

written (and premiered under Nathan Rakhlin). That said, whatever the year (I suspect Profil means 1957), it does at least sound like Mravinsky, albeit rather more hectic than the familiar Melodiya recording and visited by numerous coughs. Khachaturian's thrillingly raw Third Symphony for orchestra, 15 trumpets and organ is presented in its world-premiere performance on December 13, 1947, riotous beyond belief, the sound not bad for the period. I'd never encountered a performance of Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* recorded live in Budapest (in mono) in 1962, where Mravinsky presses hard on the accelerator at the start of the finale. Exciting, no doubt about that, but you miss the antiphonal spread of a decent stereo recording.

For me the highlight of the set, although poorly recorded, is Beethoven's Second Symphony (1940), which vies with Toscanini's from 1939 (recently reissued in superior sound by Pristine Audio) for visceral impact. Also included are versions of Symphonies Nos 3 (1961), 5 (1949), 6 (1962) and 7 (1958) as well as works by Glinka, Liadov, Rimsky-Korsakov, Berlioz, Tchaikovsky, Klyuzner (Violin Concerto with Mikhail Vaiman), Schubert (*Unfinished Symphony*), Glazunov (Symphony No 4), Arutiunian, Liszt (an especially muscular *Mephisto Waltz* No 1) and Debussy (*Première Rhapsodie* for clarinet). A curate's egg, then, and unmissable for Mravinsky completists provided they keep an open mind as to the exact provenance of one or two of the recordings programmed.

THE RECORDINGS



**Kyrill Kondrashin Edition
1937-1963**

Profil **13** PH18046



**Yevgeny Mravinsky Edition,
Vol 4**

Profil **10** PH18045

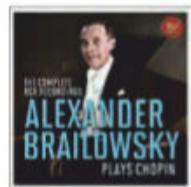


Alexander Brailowsky plays Chopin: his complete RCA recordings offer much to enjoy and transfers are excellent

Brailewsky plays Chopin

The Kiev-born pianist Alexander Brailowsky (1896-1976) had an interesting recording career, starting in Berlin in the late 1920s and ending in America in the early 1960s. Much happened to his playing style in the interim period and an all-Chopin set on RCA Red Seal chronicles the midway point in the 1940s, which included some exceptionally fluent performances of various Waltzes and Nocturnes, and remakes from the early 1950s where Brailowsky's playing had sobered considerably. More telling still are comparisons between two versions of the Third Sonata, the *Largo* in particular, the first from 1938, the second from 1954, where acute sensitivity to nuance and colour appears to have hardened to something rather less seductive. Comparisons between the recording of Chopin's First Concerto included here (under William Steinberg in 1949) and its pre-war Berlin Philharmonic predecessor (under Julius Prüwer), a world premiere on disc, now on Pristine Audio PAKM078, are again fascinating. Witness how far Brailowsky had journeyed from his spontaneous younger self: you need only compare the two versions of the concerto's finale, chalk and cheese I'd say, the first playful and impulsive, the second more reined-in. Pristine's release also includes spontaneous-sounding performances of various solo works but there's plenty to enjoy in the RCA set, most especially the recordings from the late 1930s and '40s. The transfers are excellent.

THE RECORDING



Alexander Brailowsky plays Chopin: The Complete RCA Recordings
RCA Red Seal ⑧ 88985 49999-2

Magnificent Maria Yudina

While Brailowsky's playing stiffened somewhat towards the latter part of his career, Maria Yudina's retained the full range of its considerable life force right until the end. Magnificent in her courage and refusal to compromise, in 1944 she was famously rushed to a recording assignment in the early hours to provide Stalin with a record of her interpretation of Mozart's Piano Concerto No 23, which he'd heard her play on the radio a few hours earlier. You can hear her perform the work as part of Scribendum's valuable 26-disc collection, a reading visited by extremes of mood and tempo. Her Bach could be forceful or ethereal, as was her Beethoven – in this context the Fourth Concerto, *Hammerklavier* and C minor Sonatas, and the *Diabelli* Variations are exceptional; and although Sviatoslav Richter, an admirer, thought her way with Schubert's last Sonata 'arresting as an interpretation ... the exact opposite of what it should have been', it certainly works on its own terms (two versions are included here). We also have chamber music with, among other noted collaborators, the Beethoven Quartet: Brahms's Second Piano Quartet easily compares with the version by

Richter and the Borodins and the *Largo* from Taneyev's Quintet is especially wonderful. Contemporary music, or what was viewed as contemporary in Yudina's day, was her speciality and you can appreciate the sheer commitment she applies to works by Bartók, Szymanowski, Honegger, Hindemith, Stravinsky (plenty on offer in this particular collection), Berg, Shaporin, Prokofiev, Serocki, Martinů, Krenek, Jolivet, Lutosławski and Shostakovich. Were I invited to magic a great interpreter from the past back to life for the purposes of an interview, Maria Yudina would be my first choice, and that's just on the evidence of her magnetic musical personality. Don't miss out on this set, whatever you do. Most of the recordings/transfers are more than adequate.

THE RECORDING

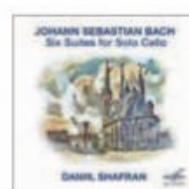


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Daniil Shafran's charismatic Bach

One of the finest string players in Yudina's set is the cellist Natalia Shakhovskaya, who plays the Debussy Sonata, her tone and overall approach a dead ringer for Daniil Shafran. Shafran himself emerges in all his tonal splendour on a complete set of Bach's Cello Suites: not, you'll note, the live recordings previously issued by Brilliant Classics (where just four of the Suites were featured), though the approach is similar, with intense vibrato applied to some notes, none to others, while Shafran at times starts without vibrato then applies it with a sudden rush. He has an impeccable sense of rhythm – these are among the most vital recorded performances of the Suites available – and if his deeply sensual delivery of the slower music won't appeal to all tastes, it's certainly different. Anything less like the 'period' school of playing would be difficult to imagine. The sound is variable, acoustic-wise, but always vivid.

THE RECORDING



Bach Solo Cello Suites
Daniil Shafran vc
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Classics RECONSIDERED



Charlotte Gardner and **Richard Bratby** revisit the 1970s recordings of Mozart string quintets from the Grumiaux Trio and friends on Philips



Mozart

String Quintets - No 1 in B flat; No 2 in C minor; No 3 in C; No 4 in G minor; No 5 in D; No 6 in E flat

Grumiaux Trio; Arpad Gérecz vn Max Lesueur va Philips

Grumiaux's sweet tone and assured technique need no recommendation, and like the rival Amadeus group he has a strong first viola and a competent cellist. Nor can this be regarded as an *ad hoc* ensemble. Janzer and Czako have been playing with Grumiaux for years. The slow movement of the B flat Quintet is virtually a duet for Grumiaux and Janzer, who play it with exquisite

involvement. The echo effects in the Minuet are beautifully managed, and in the finale the players respond as they should to music of astonishing maturity and charm. There must always be a temptation to interpret some of these quintet movements in the light of the romantic emotionalism cultivated long after Mozart's death. In the Minuet of the C minor the Amadeus stop short of tragedy whereas the Grumiaux ensemble, at the climax, attack the entries with despairing force, and very exciting it sounds. Yet in the first movement of the G minor the same players prefer a gentle melancholy to tragedy; the quiet end

is marvellously expressive. Grumiaux makes the *adagio* introduction to the finale more obviously emotional than the slow movement. The Amadeus give the slow movement much more intensity. The Amadeus view is the more impressive, but it does lessen the effect of the *adagio* introduction. The sound is good all through, and perhaps a shade more agreeable than on rival discs, and the balance is good, though it varies a little. Perhaps the Amadeus set offers a slightly more mature and profound approach to this marvellous music, but there is very little in it. **Roger Fiske (1/76)**

Charlotte Gardner I happen to be coming to this discussion having recently returned from a Wigmore Hall performance of the G minor Quintet by the Arod Quartet and Timothy Ridout, and listening again to Grumiaux and pals what strikes me afresh is just how well this set has aged. That's not to say it doesn't have its dated-sounding elements, but even with an immensely enjoyable interpretation still ringing in my ears from some of the millennial generation's brightest rising talents, these 40-year-old plus readings still feel relevant and indeed often immensely moving. It's a reminder, perhaps, that with chamber music of this majesty there's an argument for just going with your gut and playing it well, rather than getting too worked up over period appropriateness. Certainly, I can't agree with Roger Fiske's suggestion that the Amadeus offers a 'more mature and profound' approach.

Richard Bratby I know what you mean. Beginning at the beginning, that early B flat Quintet just springs off the page. It's bright and bold – there's no sense of special pleading for a work that

some commentators (I'm looking at *you*, Hans Keller) have dismissed as immature; just a feeling of joy to be playing Mozart, and a complete lack of self-consciousness in the way that Arthur Grumiaux, his regular trio partners Georges Janzer and Eva Czako and their collaborators Arpad Gérecz and Max Lesueur go about it. My first impression was that this curious Hungaro-Belgo-French team know exactly who they are, and where they're going. And yet, when you follow the performance with the score (the old Breitkopf edition – no Bärenreiter Urtext in Grumiaux's day) it's remarkable how accurately, and yet unfussily, they stick to what's written.

CG I wonder whether part of the success of these interpretations is actually down to the 'curious' assemblage of musicians. Mozart's scoring is full of duets between first violin and first viola, and there are passages scored for the top three instruments (two violins, first viola) and also the bottom three (both violas, cello) – and when you compare this bunch with rivals such as the Amadeus Quartet plus Cecil Aronowitz, or even the superlative more recent recording from the

Nash Ensemble, your attention is drawn to the benefits of a string trio base. The top two roles are taken not simply by chamber collaborators but regular duetting partners, and a first violinist who thoroughly owns and relishes the limelight. The B flat Quintet is a case in point. Also the G minor Quintet: the smoothly burnished, exuberant panache with which Grumiaux takes off for its final *Allegro*!

RB Panache is the word, and there's something irresistible about that particular *Allegro* – especially coming after the slow movement and the *Adagio* introduction to the finale. The end of the *Adagio ma non troppo* slow movement seems to me to capture all the qualities of ensemble that you mention; real inward poetry, followed by playing of the utmost pathos after they remove their mutes and move into the *Adagio* introduction. Moments like those would be enough to give this set the status of a classic. But that said, you touch on one point that does bother me slightly – the sense that Grumiaux is very much the boss throughout. Not that he's grandstanding, or anything so vulgar, but there's an assertiveness about his sound which



The Grumiaux Trio - Arthur, Eva Czako and Georges Janzer - who with two additional colleagues perform classic Mozart

(for me, anyway) sits uneasily with our more egalitarian 21st-century ideas about chamber music. Did you feel that at all?

CG For that very reason I actually had a brief flirtation with the egalitarian blend of the Melos Quartet with Franz Beyer, but ended up returning with my tail between my legs to Grumiaux, realising I missed exactly that assertiveness! Plus, Grumiaux is eminently willing to meld with the group. Take the D major's *Adagio* where his climbing trilled *piano* figures at bar 33 rise so gently above the accompanying texture. Nothing is pushed. Funnily, the moment of assertiveness that I really don't like comes instead from Janzer, because he's far too sunnily bullish for me in the *Andante* of the C major; compare him there with Lawrence Power and his poetic duetting with Marianne Thorsen (Nash Ensemble) and weep. Beyond that, though, the only assertiveness I'm less a fan of is in fact the earlier-praised B flat major's first movement. Yes, it's joyous and confident, but it's also perhaps an instance where a more period-aware lightness might have been a good thing?

RB I'm not sure. I wouldn't want to lose that ebullience and generosity – the sense that this youthful quintet is every bit as much worth our time as the acknowledged masterpieces. Don't get me wrong about Grumiaux. I don't think he's being wilfully overbearing, I'm just not fond of his E string. And he does like to hammer a spread chord

in a way that feels more aggressive than the expression demands – for instance, when he first breaks into semiquavers in the finale of the C major. For all that, though, he's still got a bottom register as velvety as any viola's, and these performances are full of blissful moments: like the way he warms his opening phrases in response to Mozart's *dolce* marking in the first movement of the C major. Now *that* I wouldn't swap for any amount of period style.

CG Likewise, I ultimately can't get too worked up over the B flat in the face of the dripping-with-romance pathos brought to the opening *Adagio* of the G minor final movement: the power of those *sfp* markings delivered as sudden swells rather than as sharp gasps; and while that whopping portamento Grumiaux brings to his bar 28 falling diminished seventh ain't period, it's utterly fabulous. I also wonder whether some of the isolated less nice-sounding moments are attributable to probably fewer edits than is now the norm (and I'm all in favour of minimal editing). In fact, on the subject of the recorded sound, this is superb, which I don't think RF bigged up as much as he could have done when his main comparison was the often rather sour-sounding Amadeus engineering. Just listen, in the D major *Adagio*, to the warmly cloaked bloom of Czako's seductive, almost jazz-like cello pizzicato from bar 53, and indeed the capturing of the others' timbres and overall texture. It's to die for.

RB In fairness to Roger Fiske, we're listening to a relatively modern (2002, I think) remastering. The original LP might have felt different. But yes, it's a near-ideal chamber-music balance (by no means a given, then or now); it accommodates big gestures at the same time as preserving a sense of intimacy when you most need it. Czako's C string never booms, and the two violas don't get muddy either. I love the little hint of a bite as the pair begin the C major variation in the C minor Quintet's finale, just enough to remind you that this was originally a horn duet in a wind serenade. And we haven't talked about the E flat Quintet, but in the contrapuntal workout at the centre of the finale you hear every player articulating their part in the argument: clear, alert, and yet still playful.

Head and heart as one.

CG So, on to the question as to whether it deserves its classic status – and for me it's a yes. Five musicians with something of their own to say, which still holds up to critical scrutiny decades later in an entirely different performance-practice world. Stand them against their older competitors and they come out on top, both for their beguiling interpretations and for their sound quality, and they have too many exquisite moments to be entirely supplanted by even the Nash Ensemble's more recent superb accounts. Plus, for those who find the B flat inconsequential (Hans Keller, *I'm looking at you, too*) and thus feel in need of something to make up for this, the latest repackaging slips in the indisputably great Trio in E flat, K563, at the end; you can't argue with this work when it's under the fingers of Grumiaux, Janzer and Czako.

RB Keller also said that the E flat Quintet was 'strictly unplayable'! We're lucky that no one told Grumiaux. In the end, this set is more than merely a historic document. We can quibble all we like over editions, vibrato, ornamentation and tempos, but as you say, even with some extremely fine modern recordings on the market, it's still hard to find a set that sounds as natural, as effortless and as insightful – in a word, as Mozartian – as this one. I just want to keep listening, and if that isn't the definition of a classic recording, I don't know what is. **G**

Books



Mike Ashman sifts through an operatic labour of love:

'Contemporary staging is a red rag to the bull of Osborne's "ear-led, eye-confirmed" dramatic credo'



Andrew Farach-Colton on a snapshot of American musical history:

'The most riveting story belongs to James Reese Europe, the black bandleader – murdered in 1919, he's been largely forgotten'

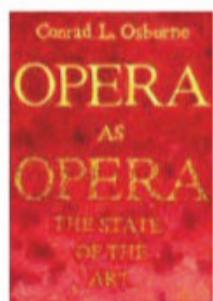
Opera As Opera

The State of the Art

By Conrad L Osborne

Proposito Press, HB, 840pp, \$45

ISBN 978-0-999-43660-8



This giant, privately printed doorstop of a book is by one of America's senior and leading critics who has also been a singer, actor and teacher and is currently a regular blogger. It reads like a cross between a blog – it was assembled piecemeal over nearly 20 years of regular writing and remains essentially unedited – and a kind of *apologia pro mia vita critica*: a collection of everything the author ever wanted to say about opera.

Reading this book – perhaps best done at first by dipping in and allowing yourself to follow whatever path takes your fancy – often leaves one disappointed by the negativity frequently expressed about opera and its practitioners today. 'I have written, with as much evidentiary support as I can muster, that opera is stumbling about in an unfriendly aesthetic environment that neither nurtures new creation nor refreshes and honors its canon of masterworks; that without a metanarrative it gropes for something to sing about amongst whatever's trending in the *Zeitgeist*; that its interpretive elements have been weakened and distorted in fundamental ways ...' You get the idea.

And yet, despite falling into almost every trap familiar to those music-based writers attempting to deal with the theatrical side of opera, Osborne gamely confesses 'I'm not quite ready for the riders [ie the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse] either'. Opera for him is not quite dead but, to borrow from Frank Zappa, it just smells funny. His opera-going and main repertoire interests are essentially American big-house-based and from the period he terms 'E-19' (the extended 19th century, operatically from Mozart to Puccini and Richard Strauss). But he has worked hard –

and tells us about it rather touchingly – to keep tabs not only on Lully and Handel or on the latest George Benjamin, but also on the 20th-century writers (several of them Structuralists) whose critical writings and ways of expressing them he rejects with a kind of dangerous, lingering temptation. He even includes a reader's guide with bluffer's constructive cheating (how to appear you know Foucault, etc).

At moments like this – and I suspect they will appeal to addictive review readers (we know who we are) – Osborne is at his most compelling. A chapter rather mistakenly called 'Onstage II: Acting' features a wonderful red-herring leap into the mid-19th-century Paris roles of the tenor Adolphe Nourrit and then on to what Osborne has clearly been longing to write about: Halévy's now almost lost opera *La Juive*. After the next 50-odd pages – not to mention a further 10 of the small-print, highly detailed, Gibbonesque endnotes that are another pleasing feature of this book – I defy anyone not to want to hear, and probably champion, that work immediately. The motor of this *explication de texte* is a comparison between the 1920s and '30s performances of Giovanni Martinelli as Eléazar and the 1999/2000 ones of Neil Shicoff. Nor is this the wipe-out victory for the Italian tenor that you might expect from this source. (Among other old 'private'/'pirate' recordings quoted here and elsewhere throughout the book are quite a few on the famous EJS Eddy Smith label, once declared in a court case to be in such bad sound that no one could claim to be losing income through their release.)

The additional strength of this 'diversion' about *La Juive* and its singers, a trope often echoed elsewhere in the book, is the sheer amount of information it provides about the work in question. Similar excursions – using the space available in such a book to, as it were, fill in the gaps inevitably left by reviews in newspapers and journals – are hardly less illuminating about such works as *Don Giovanni*, *Don Pasquale*, *Lohengrin* and *La traviata*.

There are many other matters here under serious discussion. Singing per se occupies more than 130 pages. Osborne believes (but, remember, always using the Met's large auditorium as his guideline) that many of today's voices are less powerful and less fully developed than those of their predecessors of less than a century ago. He has some remedies to suggest and puts forward more recent names (including Thomas Hampson – also praised for his literary research – and Jonas Kaufmann) whom he believes are exceptions to his general rule. Contemporary staging is (of course) a red rag to the bull of his 'ear-led, eye-confirmed' dramatic credo. A ferocious critical fire is aimed at, for two examples, Robert Wilson's *Lohengrin* and Dmitri Tcherniakov's *Prince Igor*: the bugbear is (again, of course) the simple fact that these are not naturalistic, narrative-sourced stagings, a disappointing narrowing of critical judgement on Osborne's part.

Nonetheless, this book – which has drawn exceptional praise from American critics and has already required a second printing – has to be recommended. Its detail of work, emotion and intellect offer a wealth of rewards, and it will stimulate progressives and reactionaries alike to both fury and agreement. **Mike Ashman**

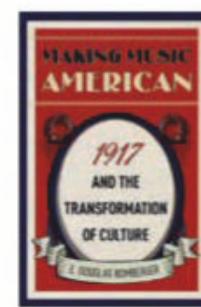
Making Music American

1917 and the Transformation of Culture

By E Douglas Bomberger

Oxford University Press, HB, 288pp, £19.99

ISBN 978-0-190-87231-1



1917 was a tumultuous year for the US. When it began, the nation was maintaining its neutrality in the bloody conflict raging across the Atlantic. President Woodrow Wilson had handily won a second term running on the slogan 'He Kept Us Out of War', yet his resolve

was tested as early as February, when the Germans resumed unrestricted submarine attacks in the Atlantic. Wilson proposed arming merchant ships – an ‘armed neutrality’. But the discovery of the Zimmerman Telegram, revealing Germany’s covert attempt to form a military alliance with Mexico, pushed Wilson over the edge. On April 6, the US declared war.

In *Making Music American*, E Douglas Bomberger makes the case that 1917 was tumultuous in American musical life, too. His evidence is a month-by-month examination of the lives of eight musicians. From the world of popular music, Bomberger gives us bandleader James Reese Europe and cornet players Dominic LaRocca and Freddie Keppard. From the classical realm, we have violinist Fritz Kreisler, contralto Ernestine Schumann-Heink, and conductors Karl Muck and Walter Damrosch – all German-born – plus a Texan, pianist Lucy Hickenlooper, who changed her name to Olga Samaroff. She and Freddie Keppard turn out to be quite minor figures in the narrative. It almost seems that Bomberger included Samaroff so that Schumann-Heink wasn’t the only woman represented. And, indeed, he devotes far more space to Samaroff’s husband, Leopold Stokowski, than to the pianist herself.

Bomberger paints vivid images of musical life in the US, with detailed notes about concerts, tour stops and repertory, as well as a generous sampling of music criticism that attests to the depth and breadth of press coverage from a time when classical music was still considered newsworthy. But these are merely picturesque details. In his preface, he writes that ‘the musical events of 1917 unfolded like a novel’, and that he’s ‘chosen to emulate that structure in recounting their history’. Actually, there are at least three distinct ‘novels’ (or novellas) here. One deals with Victor’s release of the very first jazz record – by LaRocca’s Original Dixieland ‘Jass’ Band – and how its spectacular success helped make jazz a household word by the year’s end.

A bigger story is the seismic tidal wave of anti-German hysteria triggered by the declaration of war and the different ways in which the recently lionised German-born musicians navigated increasingly treacherous currents. The contrast between Muck and Damrosch is especially well drawn. Taciturn and aloof, Muck became swept up in a manufactured scandal concerning his supposed refusal to play *The Star-Spangled Banner* at the beginning of a concert; he was eventually arrested, interned, and finally deported. The voluble



James Reese Europe – a central figure in a study of musical America in 1917 – conducts the Harlem Hellfighters

and astute Damrosch, on the other hand, swam rather gracefully with public opinion and his career flourished. Schumann-Heink comes across as a lovable force of nature. Bomberger reports how she once saved the life of a young boy who’d suffered a rattlesnake bite by sucking the poison from his arm. She made great news copy, too, with her eldest son manning an enemy submarine and her three youngest enlisted in the US army. She sang countless benefits for the troops, leading one group of officers in a training camp to request opera rather than ragtime records.

But surely the most riveting story belongs to James Reese Europe, the black bandleader. He’d been directing highly successful society orchestras to entertain gatherings of wealthy, white New Yorkers until late 1916 when he’d enlisted in a ‘coloured’ regiment of the New York National Guard in 1916. Europe went on to become a lieutenant, and as the nation braced for war, he formed the military’s finest regimental band. His unit, later known as ‘the Harlem Hellfighters’, were among the first to arrive in France – although in order to get there, he and his fellow soldiers first had to fight extremely

ugly racism at home. Europe was murdered in 1919, which helps explain why he’s been largely forgotten. Yet his influence on post-war European music was likely significant, for his band played ragtime as well as marches, and their concerts at the war’s end introduced tens of thousands of Parisians to this new, peculiarly American style of music.

Certainly, Europe’s story is a novel in itself (Reid Badger’s fine biography, *A Life in Ragtime* – OUP: 1995 – provides a thorough account). But Bomberger is an academic historian, not a novelist, and while he writes well and his book contains much that is valuable and timely – particularly on the perils of mixing art with politics and patriotism – it often reads like a textbook. I definitely could have done without the chapter summaries, for example. Another book about this period, Will Englund’s *March 1917* (Norton & Co: 2018), manages to weave detailed accounts of the US’s entry into the war and the Russian Revolution into a more elegantly flowing narrative. Still, Bomberger’s research is solid, and even if the stories he’s gathered for *Making Music American* tend to move in fits and starts, they’re all very much worth telling. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Nielsen's Violin Concerto

Carl Nielsen's Violin Concerto reflects its composer in all his many moods. **Andrew Mellor** sifts through the available recordings

One day in the mid-1870s, the young Carl Nielsen was playing the fiddle in his father's travelling band at a country wedding somewhere on Funen, the Danish island on which the composer was born and raised. On this particular occasion, the spiky-haired young Nielsen decided to indulge in an impromptu, self-appointed solo spot, airing what he described as a syncopated Polka. 'I could see from the look on my father's face that he didn't much care for it,' recalled Nielsen with typically dry humour in his autobiography *My Childhood*.

Like Sibelius's and like Elgar's, Nielsen's Violin Concerto is the work of a violinist-composer. But the fact that his concerto has never achieved the popularity of either of those counterparts has a lot to do with Nielsen's particular aesthetic, born of rural poverty rather than middle-class aspiration. Might Nielsen's wedding Polka have sounded something like the moment in his concerto's fiendishly difficult second cadenza at which the *Allegretto*'s theme is offered up with childlike naivety over a farmyard-style drone-pizzicato combination?

As difficult as that cadenza might be, the concerto's real challenge lies surely in its anti-virtuoso tendencies: its revelling in directness, roughness and even naivety rather than lacquer, empty dazzle and glitz show. Capturing and indeed prioritising those stylistic essentials doesn't come naturally to violinists schooled on the Bruch and Tchaikovsky concertos, especially given the huge range of expression Nielsen asks for *within* that particular aesthetic. Added to that, Nielsen's concerto can also seem structurally challenging and

inconsistent in itself. The composer's British champion Robert Simpson criticised it for containing 'too many reminiscences of other music.' The conductor and composer Ernő Dohnányi suggested that its two-part structure gives the impression of being conceived in two discernibly different styles.

Dohnányi could lend weight to his argument by citing the chronology of the work's composition. Nielsen began work on the concerto he had considered writing 'every year for the last quarter century' in 1911, a year after the Royal Danish Orchestra, in which he played, welcomed the talented new concertmaster Peter Møller (the concerto's intended soloist). The first phase of work on the score was done at Troldhaugen outside Bergen, the villa where Nina Grieg (Edvard's widow) had invited Nielsen to stay. 'You cannot imagine how beautiful it is here,' wrote Nielsen to his family back in Denmark in the spring of 1911, waxing lyrical on the view of Nordåsvannet bay from the villa that overlooks it from the cliff-edge.

That stretch of work is more or less commensurate with the concerto's Part 1 – its slow *Praeludium* and bushy-tailed *Allegro cavalleresco*. Back in bustling Copenhagen, his Norwegian holiday over, Nielsen laboured on the concerto's Part 2 – the more brittle, confrontational and complex *Adagio* and following *Allegretto scherzando*. It's no secret that Nielsen struggled to commit the concerto's second half to paper, and to some extent we hear as much in the music itself.

Imbalanced? That depends on your definition of the word and its application in musical terms. Considering the wider

context of Nielsen's development as a composer, the Violin Concerto arguably extends developments already afoot in its predecessor, the *Sinfonia espansiva*. The symphony might revel in plain-speaking, hard-working energy but it also hints at the disruption and obstruction of that energy. Nielsen's next two symphonies would further explore the confrontation of life-affirming energy with opposing forces, while his last would see that energy free itself once more, Houdini-like, courtesy of light-hearted skulduggery and a belief in the value of a good joke. The Violin Concerto could be said to do the same. It is cryptic, rigorous and unashamedly childish; it never misses an opportunity to sing out in a song, kick out in a dance, indulge in some contrapuntal introspection or pull a fast one to amuse its friends. In that sense, it paints a fine picture of Nielsen himself.

A SETTLING SCORE

We will never know quite how Peter Møller approached the concerto at its February 1912 premiere in Copenhagen (Nielsen conducted, also introducing the *Sinfonia espansiva*), nor how the violinist's attitude to it shifted on the tour to Berlin and Paris that followed. However, the concerto was soon taken up by a soloist almost as close to Nielsen: his son-in-law **Emil Telmányi**, the Hungarian virtuoso often incorrectly credited as the work's dedicatee (Møller and Telmányi were the only two soloists to play the concerto in Nielsen's lifetime; the score bears no specific dedication).

Despite that personal proximity, Telmányi's two recordings respectively hail from 16 and 20 years after the



composer's death. The Hungarian sounds appropriately rugged in both accounts but his tone is undeniably of its time: tight, sweet and smoothed by portamento. Truly reactive interaction with the orchestra is elusive, though there's a degree more of it under Fritz Busch in 1951 than under Egisto Tango in 1947. Telmányi can garble phrases and has to rely on all sorts of trickery just to make it through the cadenzas. He is at his best in the *Allegretto*, where he establishes a nicely elfin footing from the start, but he doesn't offer much in the way of colour variation thereafter.

Switching to the 36-year-old **Yehudi Menuhin**, you are immediately struck by a different level of musical charisma. In Menuhin's 1952 recording we hear a soloist able to confront the orchestra (and engineering able to capture it) and a violinist for whom every note counts. But Menuhin's charisma is his Achilles heel in this piece and introduces a recurrent problem in the work's recorded history. His consistently aristocratic demeanour is troubling in a concerto that gets down on its hands and knees more than it proclaims from a pedestal. Menuhin gently massages note values to tame some of Nielsen's more rugged phrases and he simply doesn't do impish. The emphatic delivery of the *Allegro cavalleresco* – Danish social democracy in musical form – is thrilling and Menuhin munches through the concerto's second cadenza like it's toast and Marmite. But there's no denying he is from a different aesthetic universe.

That fact only renders Menuhin's second recording more surprising. It followed his first by 37 years but Menuhin had the baton in his hand, not the fiddle. Soloist **Arve Tellefsen** is one of only three violinists to have recorded the work twice (alongside Telmányi and Nikolaj Znaider) and this, his own second recording, is a fine one. Knowingly or not, Tellefsen gives us the slightest reminiscences of Menuhin's portamento, dressed as cheekily raised eyebrows rather than eyes misted over.

More importantly, Tellefsen gives us copious differentiation of colour within his clean, rugged tone. When strings of demisemiquavers sequence upwards or downwards – as just before the first airing of the *Cavalleresco* theme and on plenteous occasions thereafter – each step up or down is coloured differently. Those niggling repeated notes that lead so many violinists to chirrup innocently are as disrupting sirens under Tellefsen's fingers, as in the first cadenza, which bears a stamp of fortitude. Tellefsen can be a winsome dreamer (as in the *Adagio* that opens Part 2)

but can also cajole the orchestra as if it's tied to his bow-tip, as in the chase-down that comes at the end of Part 1. We have an image of the child Nielsen in Tellefsen's airing of that tune over a drone and pizzicato in the second cadenza, full of country air and innocence.

Tellefsen's first account came 14 years before his 1989 taping with Menuhin. His colours seem less defined in the earlier version and his poise less enraptured at the end of the *Adagio*. Herbert Blomstedt's Danish National Symphony Orchestra are more bolshie than Menuhin's Royal Philharmonic, but that raises a point of order in the concerto's final pages. If the orchestra doesn't sound as though it's been put in its place by the closing bars – the bassoon's final yelp a forlorn and hopeless last gasp – then the piece can be seen as structurally open-ended; the riddle of the Sixth Symphony rather than the victory of the Fourth. If we view the concerto as something of a portrait of Nielsen, then doesn't the violinist have to win?

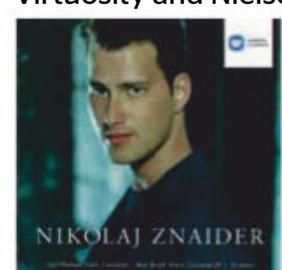
THE VIRTUOSO PROBLEM

Either way, 'winning' this concerto (or 'winning at' it) isn't always done by conventional means. **Maxim Vengerov**'s 1995 recording represents the clearest case of a soloist determined to make the score something it is not. Vengerov's precious sound, laden with a consistent

vibrato, undermines the concerto's directness and can render its more unusual phrase-shapes and copious gameplay null and void. When the impoliteness of Nielsen's text doesn't suit, Vengerov does it his own way, but the effect is at best awkward: sample the accented first note of bar 98 in the *Allegretto*, a sting in the tail, surely, but offered up by Vengerov as the sweet tail end to the phrase. He finds a beautifully boyish, woody tone at the recap of the *Allegretto* theme just after the second cadenza and there is whimsy in his *Adagio*. But that's as good as Vengerov's recording gets.

THE VIRTUOSO CHOICE

Nikolaj Znaider *vn* London Philharmonic Orchestra / Lawrence Foster
EMI/Warner Classics Ⓛ 556906-2
Virtuosity and Nielsen's Violin Concerto



are uneasy bedfellows but Nikolaj Znaider's first recording of the piece shows off his inestimable skill while remaining more questing than showy.

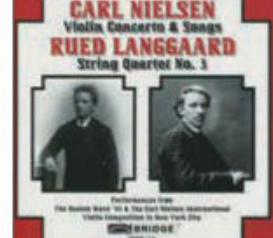


(L-R): Composer Bror Beckman, soloist Peter Møller and Nielsen after the work's 1912 premiere

THE LIVE CHOICE

Saeka Matsuyama *vn* Odense Symphony Orchestra / Jan Wagner
Bridge Ⓛ BRIDGE9100

No wonder the Odense Symphony Orchestra



wanted to record with her: Saeka Matsuyama relishes Nielsen's distinctive niggles and his breakout lyricism, and offers plenteous charm.

Vengerov's could be described as a 'violinist's' performance in its tendency to revel in the sound of the instrument more than the sound of the music. The same can be said of **Henning Krøgerud**'s, which can sentimentalise and shies away from both directness and confrontation.

Kolja Blacher is showy in the Vengerov mould, with a few too many corners smoothed rather than pointed and shapes caressed rather than flung out. The most recent recording, from the impressive winner of the 2016 Carl Nielsen International Violin Competition, **Jiyoong Lee**, is more successful but can tend towards the same brand of overt virtuosity, particularly in the *Adagio*. Here,

Lee wants to squeeze that bit too much expression from music whose plainness – its gaze towards the horizon – makes it wondrous; but who can blame Lee, in her debut recording, for wanting to show us the beauty of her tone?

More of a talking point is Lee's handling of the soloist's reprise of the *Cavalleresco* theme, after the orchestra has itself given us the theme for a second time and with more churning contradiction than before. Yes, the theme *must* sound more emphatic here and under Lee's fingers it does, but only because she pulls and pushes at it. **Cho-Liang Lin** demonstrates that you can achieve the

THE RUNNER-UP

Cecilia Zilliacus *vn* Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra / Daniel Blendulf
dB Productions Ⓛ DBCD162

Not much separates the colour, fortitude,



flexibility and focus of Cecilia Zilliacus from that of Vilde Frang but some might prefer her slightly more controlled view of the piece and its idiosyncrasies.

same ends – a more emphatic, desperate-sounding rendition of the theme (from bar 270) – without pushing and pulling at it and without even going beyond the *forte* volume marking. Lin's recording was a *Gramophone* Award-winner back in the day, hailed by Robert Layton as the finest account to date. It had impressive fortitude but can feel tame today. One sticking point is precisely the 'aristocratic finesse' Layton referred to.

The virtuoso question is addressed twice, in different ways, by **Nikolaj Znaider** – one of only three Danish violinists to have recorded the concerto and a player known precisely for that aristocratic finesse and mahogany, central European tone. In summary, Znaider appears to have softened with age. His 1999 recording with Lawrence Foster is a front-runner: a grinding, singing, whimsical account in which the soloist projects the necessary charisma to take on the orchestra. Znaider's technical credentials and his experience with Bach pay dividends in two thorny cadenzas, even if the drone/pizzicato effects in the second sounds a little cultivated. His linking arms with the orchestra's horns and bassoons in the *Adagio*'s *tranquillo* passage is probably the most atmospheric on record. But if Znaider lets himself get angry and even a little dirty in this first recording, he is less impressive 13 years later in New York. Here, his tone is sweeter (though he apparently plays on the same 'ex-Goodman' Guarneri), he appears more determined to squeeze emotive juice out of slower phrases (rather than fix a point on the horizon), and he doesn't have sufficient authority in the face of Alan Gilbert's frisky New York Philharmonic.

PLAIN VERSUS PEDESTRIAN

Of the other Danes, **Jens Laursen** scores on spirit more than accuracy or quality of tone, while his South Jutland Symphony Orchestra sounds ropy despite the presence of Mariss Jansons on the podium. Still, Laursen finds something special in the *Adagio*'s *tranquillo* section and offers up a typically Danish reminder that serenity can come from a strong, flat tone – the horizon on Nielsen's Funen – as much as from a sweet, fluttering one. Likewise, **Kim Sjögren** offers countryside rather than concert-hall lyricism for Michael Schønwandt, and with anything but an aristocratic tone, but he can lose focus in the slow passages.

Striking a balance between the attractively plain and the frustratingly pedestrian is one of this concerto's most enduring problems. **Dong-Suk Kang** is pleasingly unfussy where he needs to be and, conspiring with conductor Myung-



Emil Telmányi, Nielsen's son-in-law, soon took up the work in concert

Whun Chung, conjures a fine sense of repose at the end of the *Praeludium* and in the *Adagio*. All that's missing is the sort of range of expression that would see Kang do more with those niggling repeated notes, patterned sequences and cadenzas. If Kang gives us a flat, 'demonstration' version of the concerto, **James Carney** a decade later falls on the wrong side of that line, even if

an excellent recording of the Sibelius Concerto, Skride's Nielsen is nonetheless troubled right from the beginning and the lack of imposition that characterises her opening chord. She rarely sounds like a match for the Tampere Philharmonic and, as such, the confrontations sound narrated rather than acted. **Malcolm Stewart** has similar problems facing down the Royal

his initial plainness of tone suggests he won't. Ultimately, Carney doesn't do enough with his instrument; the chase-down at the end of Part 1 is pedestrian and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra are reluctant to chide and snipe at him in Part 2.

There is something of the salon style about Carney's violin tone that sets it in direct contrast to Laursen's.

Baiba Skride's is different again: delicate, translucent and far more effective up high than down low.

Coupled with

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1947 Telmányi ; Royal Danish Orch / Tango	Danacord ⑧ ③ DACOCD354/6; ⑧ (30 discs) DACOCD801/30 (8/48 ^R , 1/16)
1951 Telmányi ; Danish St Broadcasting Orch / Busch	Danacord ⑩ ② DACOCD707/8; ⑧ (30 discs) DACOCD801/30 (1/16)
1952 Menuhin ; Danish St RSO / Wöldike	Danacord ⑧ (30 discs) DACOCD801/30 (9/53 ^R , 1/16)
1975 Tellefsen ; Danish RSO / Blomstedt	EMI/Warner Classics ⑩ ⑧ 381503-2; ⑩ ⑧ 206882-2 (10/75 ^R)
1978 Laursen ; Southern Jutland SO / Jansons	Danacord ⑩ ② DACOCD467/8 (3/97)
1987 Kang ; Gothenburg SO / Chung	BIS ⑩ BIS-CD370 (12/87); ⑩ BIS-CD616 (7/93); ⑩ ④ BIS-CD614/6
1988 Lin ; Swedish RSO / Salonen	Sony Classical ⑧ ⑥ 88875 16797-2 (1/89 ^R)
1989 Tellefsen ; RPO / Menuhin	Simax ⑩ PSC1144 (9/90 ^R)
1990 Sjögren ; DanishNat RSO / Schønwandt	Chandos ⑩ CHAN8894 (4/91)
1995 Vengerov ; Chicago SO / Barenboim	Apex ⑧ 2564 67300-5 (9/96 ^R)
1997 Carney ; Bournemouth SO / Bakels	Naxos ⑩ 8 554189 (8/00)
1998 Anthony ; New York Scandia SO / Matson	Centaur ⑩ ⑧ CRC2442
1999 Matsuyama ; Odense SO / Wagner	Bridge ⑩ BRIDGE9100; Alto ⑧ ALC1288 (1/06 ^R)
1999 Znaider ; LPO / Foster	EMI/Warner Classics ⑧ ⑧ 556906-2 (4/01)
2003 Stewart ; RLPO / Bostock	Classico ⑩ ⑧ CLASSCD638
2011 Frang ; Danish NSO / Jensen	EMI/Warner Classics ⑩ ⑧ 602570-2 (9/12)
2012 Znaider ; New York PO / Gilbert	Dacapo ⑩ ⑧ 6 220556 (8/15); ⑩ ④ ⑧ 6 200003
2014 Zilliacus ; Helsingborg SO / Blendulf	dB Productions ⑩ DBCD162 (2/16)
2015 Blacher ; Duisburg PO / Bellincampi	Acousence ⑩ ⑧ ACO22115
2015 Skride ; Tampere PO / Rouvali	Orfeo ⑩ ⑧ C896 152A (9/15)
2016 Kragerud ; Malmö SO / Engeset	Naxos ⑩ 8 573738 (4/17)
2017 Lee ; Odense SO / Poska	Orchid ⑩ ORC100079 (A/18)



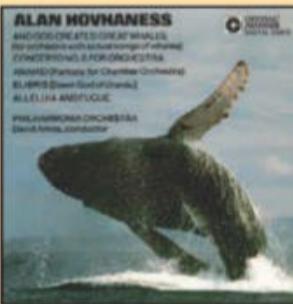
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Vilde Frang's 'range of colours and careful gradation of vibrato', with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra under Jensen, 'are superlative'

Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. Not for want of tonal weight, as it happens; in the end, it's the slow speed of his *Allegro cavalleresco* under Douglas Bostock that proves fatal.

A NEW UNDERSTANDING

As we all learn more about the impulses that lie behind Nielsen's music – and as the age of the virtuoso recedes into the distance – we appear to be getting closer to the core of a work that stands in such contrast to most of its direct neighbours. If it's Nordic musicians recording post-millennium who seem most attuned to the Violin Concerto's huge range of demands – a conclusion it's hard not to draw from this survey – then there is an exception in **Saeka Matsuyama**, runner-up and Orchestra Prize-winner at the 1999 Carl Nielsen International Competition.

Matsuyama was a worthy winner in the only year the competition has been held outside Denmark. She is as relentless and insistent as she is dreamy and lonely on her live recording made in New York with the orchestra of Nielsen's home town, the Odense Symphony. Matsuyama offers constant charisma and appealing strength of tone. Another American, **Adele Anthony**, offers similar tonal strength but channels

it through a filter of unflinching and inflexible vibrato (she is also caught in a poor acoustic with a flabby orchestra and all manner of noises off). Few violinists, in contrast, can harness Nielsen's sense of breakaway lyricism like Matsuyama can without sugarizing or fattening it; she is not afraid to appear ugly as she digs away at those copious repeated notes.

Many of the same qualities, and more, are offered by **Vilde Frang**, recorded 12 years later. There is the odd touch of eyebrow-raising intervention in Frang's account but her range of colours and careful gradation of vibrato are superlative (particularly the way she frequently tempers down her vibrato, as at the end of the opening *Praeludium*). Frang has a direct way with the *Allegro cavalleresco* that is both upstanding and humbling. Her trolling of Thomas Søndergård's Danish National Symphony Orchestra gains conviction, her cadenzas are superior to anyone's in character, colour and rigour and her elfin charm – taking in petulance, anger, pride and gregariousness – brings a high level of clarity to the *Allegretto* while imbuing it with momentum. The games that can appear awkward from so many others – such as the flipping of the registers from bar 231 in Part 2 – feel like second nature to Frang.

If Frang's performance can feel revisionist, it is arguably conceived in Nielsen's image. For an account that's one or two degrees straighter without lacking character – Nielsen up to his tricks as a more knowing adult rather than a fearless child – **Cecilia Ziliacus** offers a fine alternative if Frang holds the number-one spot. Ziliacus offers fortitude but can dream too; her cadenzas give us poised and powerful phraseology and she is well matched by the Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra, snapping thrillingly at her heels at the end of Part 1. Any violinist who is upfront about her initial fear of Nielsen's occasional 'ugliness' in the CD booklet is on to something. From Ziliacus, virtuosity is the means, not the end – the right way round in this work. **G**

THE TOP CHOICE

Vilde Frang vn Danish National Symphony Orchestra / Eivind Gullberg Jensen

EMI/Warner Classics M 602570-2

Vilde Frang offers a wider range of



moods and colours than her rivals; in more holistic terms, she sounds at one with the concerto's mood of rapture, impetuosity and fun.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

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Main Hall, Concertgebouw Amsterdam

& online

Concerto Köln, April 21

Contemplative moments juxtaposed with bursts of *joie de vivre* is the mood palette for this Easter Amsterdam visit from Concerto Köln: a lunchtime concert live-streamed for free on the Concertgebouw's website. Running with no interval, the programme begins with Vivaldi's Concerto in A, RV158, then moves through JS Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto* No 4 and Geminiani's Concerto Grosso No 1, before finishing with another *Brandenburg*, this time No 5. As for the soloists, they are violinist Evgeny Sviridov who leads, recorder players Cordula Breuer (also transverse) and Wolfgang Dey, and harpsichordist Wiebke Weidanz.

concertgebouw.nl

Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse de Lyon

Lyons International Chamber Music Competition, April 23-27

Established in 2004, this chamber music competition focuses on a different instrumental grouping each year, with voice and piano taking the spotlight for 2019. From an artist perspective, the rewards are worth having: €26,000 in total, plus concert engagements for the likes of Radio France Musique and the Festival Radio France Occitanie, and a Belle Saison residency with concerts. There are big names on the jury, too, including singers Felicity Lott and Andreas Schmidt. As for what's in it for us watching the live streams from our sofas, the answer is some fantastic music, a healthy proportion of which is French: semi-final set works include music by Jean-Guy Ropartz and Théodore Dubois, while the finalists will pick songs from a new competition-commissioned arrangement of Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été*, for voice, piano, flute, clarinet, violin and cello.

cimcl.fr, nomadmusic.fr

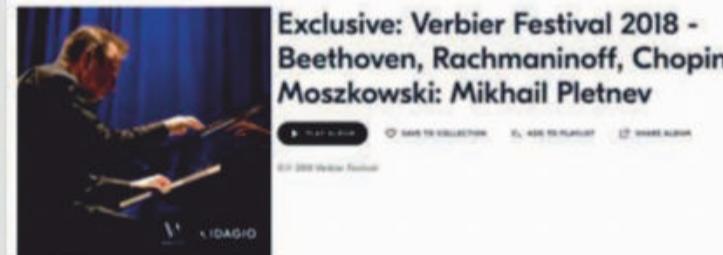
Grieghallen, Bergen & bergenphilllive.no

De Unges Konsert Young Soloists Competition, April 25

The competition gets more intense each year as young performers from Norway, Denmark and Sweden vie for the honour of appearing with the Bergen Philharmonic, along with a career-boosting scholarship from the Kavli Trust. This year's competition sees the Bergen Philharmonic conducted by Catherine Winnes, and whether you're in to competitions or not,

ARCHIVE AUDIO REVIEW

Mikhail Pletnev plays Beethoven, Rachmaninov and Chopin live in 2018



Verbier Festival recital

Mikhail Pletnev's 2018 Verbier recital reveals an artist who still commands the means to do whatever he wants at the piano. His *affetuoso* style, however, is more prone to exaggeration and caricature than ever, such as in the Beethoven Op 51 No 1 Rondo's petulant accents, purposeless tempo modifications and overdone breaking of hands. Pletnev's grossly italicised approach to the same composer's *Appassionata* doesn't read between the music's lines as much as annihilate them, and what's with that low-energy coda to the finale? The Rachmaninov selections embody both Pletnev's most wonderful and annoying qualities as a musician.

Pletnev justifies his maddeningly protracted unfolding of the Op 3 No 1 *Élégie* by wringing out the harmonic tension to the proverbial max. Likewise, the pianist's gorgeous three-dimensional textural deployment in the famous

C sharp minor Prelude transcends any reservations about his controversial time-stretching. One can say the same about the D major Prelude, as well as the hypnotically spun-out legato phrasing in the B flat major Prelude's central section. The problem is that Rachmaninov's points of climax are unambiguously clear in his scores, yet almost non-existent thanks to Pletnev's dynamic and tempo revisions. His encores include a weighty and sombre Chopin C sharp minor Nocturne and a Moszkowski A flat Etude that's more fancifully nuanced than truly scintillating. **Jed Distler**

Available via idagio.com as part of a subscription package starting at \$/€9.99 per month

it's just got the makings of a thoroughly crowd-pleasing concert with its crowd-pleasing concerto extracts. Pianist Nikita Khnykin (born 2003) performs the second and third movements of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 1; from cellist Leonardo Chiodo (1998) it's the first movement of Haydn's Cello Concerto No 2; violinist Lorenz Karls (2001) plays the first movement of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto; mezzo Ingvild Schultze-Floreys (1992) sings 'Parto, parto' from Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito* plus two Richard Strauss songs; then from cellist Fred Lindberg (1995) there's the first movement of Lalo's Cello Concerto. Furthermore, if you tune in live then you get to be part of the process yourselves by voting online for the Kavli Audience Prize.

bergenphillive.no

OperaVision

Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*, April 26

Set in 1682 and centred on the events which saw Peter the Great take the Russian throne, Mussorgsky's historical epic *Khovanshchina* doesn't get all that many airings. So it's good news indeed that Moscow's Stanislavsky

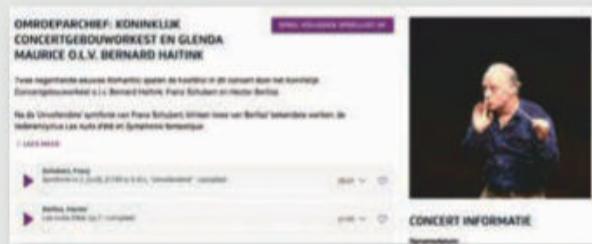
Music Theatre's acclaimed production by Alexander Titel arrives this month on OperaVision, for viewing on demand. For devotees of the work, it's Shostakovich's orchestration that's used for this production, as opposed to the Rimsky-Korsakov one, and it's conducted by Alexander Lazarev.

operavision.eu

Gothenburg & GSOPay

Blomstedt conducts Mahler's Symphony No 1, April 27

Herbert Blomstedt discovered Mahler at the end of the 1970s as chief conductor in Dresden. He recounts, 'I read a lot there about the history and traditions of European Jews, about the village musicians and the songs that expressed both longing and grief. Mahler's First Symphony has a theme from a Jewish folksong, which I perceived as an equivalent of Beethoven's picture of folk life, adapted for a symphonic context. And I saw how brilliantly orchestrated it was! Since then, I love his music.' In other words, Blomstedt has something to say with Mahler, so this guest appearance conducting the First Symphony

Bernard Haitink in concert 26 years apart, with Amsterdam's Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1983 and the LSO in 2019**Bernard Haitink live**

Dutch radio has disinterred a 1983 Concertgebouw concert from its archives. A dark and predictably Brucknerian shadow hangs over Schubert's *Unfinished*, for all the refinements of orchestral balance, and Glenda Maurice sometimes sings under the note and behind the pulse in *Les nuits d'été*, but the concert's real interest lies in more Berlioz: a *Symphonie fantastique*, measured but

sharply coloured, with a proper cornet in the waltz, a freshly sprung 'Scène aux champs' and a finale rivalling even Sir Colin Davis for inner-part clarity.

Over at Medici TV the eyes have it in a filmed concert from the conductor's 90th-birthday appearances with the London Symphony Orchestra in March. In the opening tutti of Mozart's E flat Piano Concerto, K482, the remote – and a touch wobbly – cameras give us Haitink as he has been seen and praised by countless orchestral musicians over the years, showing them exactly how he wants a phrase shaped and shaded by the merest glance in their direction.

The LSO play a period-aware foil to Till Fellner as the unfussy, self-effacing

soloist, but they come into their own with Bruckner's Fourth Symphony, in a performance of insight and cogency unusual even by Haitink's exemplary standards. This music still fires his blood: we see it, and feel it too, especially in the complex architecture of the outer movements, unfolding more broadly than before, completely of a piece with the *Andante*'s melancholy restraint. Bruckner doesn't get more lucid – or, in the finale's coda, more transcendent – than this.

Peter Quantrill

Concertgebouw concert is available to listen to for free until June 6 at nporadio4.nl/concerten and the LSO concert is available at medici.tv until June 10. Subscriptions start at £12.90 per month.

with the Gothenburg Symphony is sure to be worth watching; and of course the GSOPlay streams are free, too. It's preceded by Haydn's Symphony No 104, *London*.

gso.se

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & live in cinemas worldwide**Gounod's Faust, April 30**

David McVicar's production of Gounod's *Faust* draws parallels between Faust and Gounod, who as a composer was torn between piety and worldly (and romantic) success; and it does so through highly theatrical sets and costumes paying tribute to the art and architecture of 1870s Paris. Dan Ettinger conducts this live stream from Covent Garden, with an A-lister cast featuring Michael Fabiano as Faust, Erwin Schrott as Méphistophélès, Diana Damrau as Marguerite, and Stéphane Degout as Valentin.

roh.org.uk/cinemas

Barbican, London & YouTube**Rattle conducts Berlioz and Adams, May 5**

By the time Berlioz's 150th anniversary year draws to a close, we're all likely to have lost count of the number of times the extraordinary *Symphonie fantastique* has popped up in concert. As a result, the performances which truly stand out are likely to have been the ones which combine a knock-out performance with programming that genuinely brings something new to the table. So enter Simon Rattle and the LSO, who are pairing it in this live-streamed concert with music by John Adams, his *Harmonielehre*, a work from a composer who like Berlioz professes to be 'enchanted by the orchestra', and which with its quotations from Schoenberg, Mahler and Sibelius –

and its sheer size – reaches back to Romanticism in an entirely modern way. Tune into the orchestra's YouTube channel half an hour early and you'll also catch the live introduction from backstage.

iso.co.uk, youtube.com/user/LsoKNu56rl

Orchestra Hall, Detroit & DSOLive**Gerstein plays Tchaikovsky, May 5**

It may be Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1 that usually hogs the limelight, but this Detroit Symphony concert is bent on making the case for No 2 with its melting triple concerto of a slow movement featuring solo cello and violin alongside the piano. Kirill Gerstein joins the Detroit SO as piano soloist, under the baton of Ben Glassberg. It's then England and Bohemia that get the spotlight on either side of the Tchaikovsky, Walton's Suite for *Henry V* opening the concert, and Dvořák's Symphony No 8 bringing it to a close.

dso.org

Teatr Wielki, Warsaw, OperaVision**& vod.teartwielki.pl****Moniuszko singing competition opening gala and finals, May 5-11**

There's an extra-celebratory air to the 10th International Stanislaw Moniuszko Vocal Competition this year, because it's a jubilee edition which forms part of the celebrations marking the bicentenary of Moniuszko's birth. As a result, the first of OperaVision's two live streams is the Opening Gala taking place on the actual 200th anniversary of the composer and conductor's birth, and featuring the competition's past winners. The second of OperaVision's streams is the final with orchestra, whose repertoire includes music from a Polish opera or oratorio, with Moniuszko's own music among the options.

If those two streams aren't enough for you, though, you can also watch all the auditions via the theatre's website. The standard promises to be high, too, because beyond a first prize of €15,000, the competition offers singers the chance to be heard by a particularly illustrious panel of judges.

vod.teartwielki.pl, operavision.eu

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide**Dialogues des Carmélites, May 11**

It's Poulenc's devastating story of faith and martyrdom that gets the honour of being the Met's last Live in HD screening of the 2018-19 season, in the popular production created for The Met in 1977 by John Dexter, and it's a wonderful trinity of singers in the top three roles. Isabel Leonard sings Blanche de la Force, the aristocratic nun who must overcome a pathological timidity in order to answer her life's calling. She's then joined by Karita Mattila as Madame de Croissy and Karen Cargill as Mère Marie. Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts.

metopera.org/season/in-cinemas/

Recital Hall, Amsterdam Concertgebouw & online**Quirine Viersen in recital, May 12**

The Dutch cellist Quirine Viersen isn't so often to be seen on UK and US shores, so this free live-streamed lunchtime concert from Amsterdam is an opportunity to see her in action, rather than simply hear her via recordings. Pianist Thomas Beijer accompanies her for this intimate concert from the Concertgebouw's Recital Hall, that features music by Beethoven, Janáček and Mendelssohn.

concertgebouw.nl

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The ultimate all-in-one LP system?

Turntables with built-in amplifiers are nothing new but McIntosh has a very high-end approach

Given the current revival in the fortunes of the vinyl LP, manufacturers are exploring any way possible to attract buyers to their brands. Of late we've seen the return of the record player, offering a complete playback solution: down at the budget end of the market we have everything from re-creations of the all-in-one players of the 1950s and '60s through to models such as Pro-ject's Juke Box line, which has built-in amplification and more, and to which one only needs to add a pair of speakers.

And that last idea also informs the new model from US high-end company McIntosh, the £7945 MTi100 ①: as well as being a turntable, it has onboard valve-based amplification, digital and analogue audio inputs and even Bluetooth HD wireless connectivity.

The two-speed belt-drive turntable has an aluminium platter weighing over 3kg, with a matching tonearm fitted with a modified Sumiko Olympia moving magnet cartridge. The turntable's top plate is made from the same 9.5mm glass found on the front of the company's amplifiers, below which is a 6.5mm metal plate. Within is a valve-powered preamplifier, with the two 12AX7 valves in cages beside the tonearm, a phono stage in a separate shielded box and Class D power amplification good for 80W per channel into 4ohms, or 50Wpc into 8ohms. The Bluetooth 4.2 section has an external amplifier, and the company's High Drive amplifier powers the MTi100's headphone amp. The player comes complete with a remote control for amplifier functions.

Exposure, meanwhile, is bolstering its CD-player offering with a new model in its compact XM range. The £1200



XM CD ② comes in a choice of black or titanium finish, and uses a top-loading mechanism to feed a digital section based around the PCM 1716 24-bit converter, with a high-stability crystal clock reference and dedicated power-supply regulator for the transport and audio stages to lower jitter. Separate windings on the mains transformer feed the CD mechanism and audio stages, and all aluminium casework is used to reduce mechanical and electrical interference. The player comes complete with a remote control, which can also turn off the display for less electrical noise, and has digital outputs for DACs or amplifiers with digital inputs.

Klipsch has launched its Premiere Reference speaker range in the UK ③, with no fewer than 18 models distinguished by their use of Tractrix horn-mounted titanium dome tweeters for high frequencies, and the company's copper-spun Cerametallic low-frequency drivers. These are designed for extremely low mass and high rigidity, and are loaded with Tractrix reflex ports in most of the models in the range.

The speakers come in a choice of ebony or walnut finishes with matt black baffles and copper trim-rings, and the range includes five floorstanding models (including one with upward-firing Dolby Atmos effects speakers) and three bookshelf/standmount designs, while there's also a wide choice of effects and centre-channel speakers, and a trio of active subwoofers. Prices start at £400 a pair for the smallest bookshelf model (the RP-400M) and go all the way up to £2400/pr for the RP-8060A, complete with those Dolby Atmos drivers.

Coming back to turntables, Technics has expanded its direct drive range with two new models: the SL-1210 Mk7 is the latest in a celebrated line, and the first of the new models aimed directly at the DJ market, while the SL-1500C is designed to bring the price of the range down to more affordable levels ④. The price for the turntables, due to be launched this summer, was still to be set at the time of going to press, but the SL-1500C will come complete with a pre-fitted Ortofon 2M Red cartridge, and has a built-in moving magnet phono stage.

Finally this month, Scottish company Atlas Cables has extended its high-end Mavros range into the USB arena. The new Mavros Grun USB ⑤ uses high-purity oxygen-free conductors and the company's Grun screening topology, which has an external 1m connection to the system ground. Available with both Type A and B standard and micro USB connectors, the cables start from £465 for a half-metre length, going up to £735 for a 5m model. ⑥

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Novafidelity X45

The X45 should handle all your digital music storage, streaming and playback needs. Just add amp and speakers

As some indicator of just how comprehensive is the specification of the £2149 Novafidelity X45, the box in which it arrives is comprehensively logo'd, and the instruction manual has 14 pages of legalese before you get to the contents list – and that only covers a small part of what it does!

Part of an ever-expanding range from the Korean manufacturer, the X45 does seem to have a very ambitious price-tag – at least until you get to grips with everything it offers. So what exactly is it all about, and what does it do? Well, for a start it's a network-connected CD ripper/server/player, meaning it can copy your discs to an internal or external hard drive, then allow you to summon them up using the unit's own control, the Novatron Music X app available for Android and iOS, or a web browser interface.

The CD transport ripping system is linked to the Gracenote database to identify and tag music as it's ripped, and the capacity of the X45 depends on the hard drive you select. The basic price quoted above is the 'barebones' unit, to which the user can add their own hard drive, a process that takes only a few moments thanks to the sliding 'caddy' in the rear panel. Alternatively you can order the Novafidelity prefitted with conventional hard drives, from 2TB at an extra £140 to 8TB (£300), or solid state storage from £190 for 500GB to £515 for 2TB.

To give you some idea of how those capacities equate to CDs, Novafidelity says 500GB is good for 650 CDs in

uncompressed WAV format, or 1950 in FLAC; 2TB of storage will hold 2600 and 7800 discs respectively, and 8TB 10,400/31,200. On which points, a couple of observations: the first is that anyone committing those quantities of discs to a single storage device should really have a back-up, either in the form of a USB hard drive plugged into the X45 or a network storage solution on the home network – hard drives can, and do, fail, and it will take a very long while to re-rip 650 CDs, let alone one of the larger capacities.

The second is that you can save an appreciable amount by buying it 'bare bones' and spending a few minutes installing the drive yourself. For example a good 2TB HDD, such as a WD Red or a Seagate Ironwolf, will cost you around £70, and while the savings on 8TB drives are smaller, you can still get one for about £225 or so. Similarly with the solid-state drives, less than £100 will buy you a 2TB model.

However, the CD ripping/playing function is just the start of the X45's abilities: it can also serve its files to other DLNA/UPnP players on your home network, which encompasses a wide range of players and multiroom speaker systems, and can also play music held on external network storage devices. In addition, it can store and play music at way beyond CD file formats, including PCM all the way up to 352.8kHz/24bit as well DSD 64/128/256, which means you're covered for just about every commercial music file format – even the very esoteric ones.

Loading of content beyond CD resolutions is carried out using USB media, for which the unit has three ports – one



NOVAFIDELITY X45

Type CD ripper/server with hi-res network playback, streaming services and USB DAC

Price £2149 (without hard drive), £2289-£2664 with storage installed, depending on type/capacity

Inputs Optical, coaxial and AES/EBU digital, USB audio, line on RCAs, aux on front-panel 3.5mm socket, MM phono

Outputs Optical, coaxial and AES/EBU digital, USB audio, HDMI, fixed/variable analogue out on phono and XLRs, headphones

Other connections 3 USB for external storage, DAB/FM antenna, Ethernet, Wi-Fi via optional adapter

Accessories supplied Remote handset, radio antennae

Finishes Black or silver

Dimensions (WxHxD) 44x11.8x32.9cm, without feet

scvdistribution.co.uk

cocktailaudio.com

front and two back – or over the home network from a computer. The X45 can also act as a player for externally stored files, and can act as an endpoint for a Roon system, enabling music to be played to it from remote Roon devices, and has MQA decoding for stored files, the very few MQA discs out there or – perhaps most relevant – Tidal Masters high-resolution streaming content.

Ah yes, streaming: with a network internet connection, either using Wi-Fi via an

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To make the most of the Novafidelity X45, try using it alongside ...

NAD C268

The X45 can be used straight into a power amplifier, thanks to its variable output level: the NAD C268 is a powerful, cost-effective amp perfect for such use



AUDIOLAB 6000A

Alternatively, the fixed-level line out can be used into a conventional integrated amplifier or preamp. The slimline Audiolab 6000A would be a good match



optional £35 wireless dongle or (preferably) wired Ethernet, and the appropriate subscription(s), the X45 can stream music from services including Deezer, Napster, Qobuz, Spotify, Tidal, and TuneIn radio. There's also a built-in DAB/FM radio tuner for those of us who prefer our wireless over the air rather than via the internet.

The unit can record from all radio sources to its internal storage; from analogue audio sources, having both line-in and moving magnet phono inputs, and digital ones, for which it has optical, coaxial and AES/EBU connections. It will also function as a digital-to-analogue converter for a computer, thanks to an asynchronous USB Type B input.

Ripping discs is smooth and simple, requiring little more than the posting of the CD into the slot and leaving the X45 to do its stuff

Outputs extend to the usual analogue connections, on both single-ended RCA sockets and balanced XLRs, which can be set to fixed level for use into a conventional amplifier, or variable to connect straight to a power amp. There's the same trio of digital output formats provided for input, a USB audio output to serve suitably equipped DACs or amplifiers, and an HDMI socket. The latter allows both the X45 to be connected to a TV screen or monitor, meaning the display information can be viewed on the grand scale if the 7in screen provided isn't large enough, and also audio to be output to suitable devices such as AV receivers and DACs equipped with an I2S input on this connection.

At the heart of the Novafidelity is a dual-core ARM processor, with a separate microcontroller for the USB Type B input, while the digital-to-analogue conversion is in the hands of a pair of ESS ES9018K2M Sabre chips, one for each channel, and the unit also allows files to be upscaled or downsampled as required.

PERFORMANCE

With so much on offer, it's perhaps not surprising that using the solidly built X45 for all but the simplest functions takes a

little familiarisation – the manual runs to some 120 pages! But with a little hands-on time, it soon becomes easy to make use of the myriad functions, although I am sure that even after extensive ownership one would still be having 'I didn't know it could do that' moments.

What's more, although it lacks the industrial-design slickness of some rival brands to the point of looking a bit basic and 'old school', there are no such reservations about the performance on offer here, whether using it as a ripper/player, a streaming client, a server for other network devices or even a USB DAC for a computer.

Ripping discs is smooth and simple (at least once you have set up in the menu the format in which you want your music stored), requiring little more than the posting of the CD into the slot and leaving the X45 to do its stuff. Loading existing files into the internal storage via USB or a network connection is a relatively slow process, but at least you'll (hopefully) only have to do it once, after which incremental updates will be rather quicker. By the way, other updates to the unit are 'over the air' using the network connection, which is also straightforward.

Streaming services, whether internet radio, Qobuz, Spotify or Tidal, are easy to set up and use, and the Novafidelity was immediately recognised on my Roon network, and I was able to play music on it using the Roon app on my tablet.

One might expect, given the sheer amount of capability packed in here, that the sound would be adequate at best, but this company has been making devices like this for a good while, and that really shows in a mature, detailed and dynamic presentation of whatever music you choose to play. Yes, there are highly optimised network players able to deliver an even closer insight into a recording, but the Novafidelity is extremely impressive given its features list.

Passing through the listening room at the same time was a Naim ND5 XS 2, which certainly bettered the sound of the X45 for the same kind of money, especially when it comes to ambience and the solidity of its bass, but of course offers rather less on the facilities front. The 'fully loaded' machine puts up a fine fight with everything from

Or you could try...

It's difficult to suggest direct rivals for the X45, so uniquely comprehensive is its range of facilities, but ...

Pioneer UDP-LX800

A player such as the Pioneer UDP-LX800 offers a wide range of disc playback options as well as network streaming for around the same price as the Novafidelity. What it lacks on the disc-ripping front it makes up for by also being an exceptionally good Blu-ray disc machine for video content. See more at pioneer.eu



Bluesound Vault 2i

The Bluesound Vault 2i offers a similar range of ripping and streaming facilities to the X45, in a compact black or white package with a fixed 2TB internal drive. There's no display, and you'll definitely need a smartphone or tablet to operate it, but it can integrate with a range of BlueOS products from Bluesound and NAD, and is about half the price of the Novafidelity. For more information, visit bluesound.com



Naim Uniti Star

In some ways the Naim Uniti Star is similar to the X45; in others it's totally different. There's a built-in CD drive for playback and (with the addition of USB or SD card storage) ripping, and like both the X45 and Vault 2i can serve those ripped files to other UPnP streamers on the same network. It's also a complete 'just add speakers' system, with built-in amplification, and carries a £3499 price-tag. Full details at naimaudio.com



complex orchestral works through to delicate solo instrumental recordings, and sounds especially sparkling when playing high-resolution PCM and DSD files.

Yes, the X45 is slightly complex to use – that's inevitable with its comprehensive specification – but it's worth getting to know: this is a striking 'do it all' digital component. 

● REVIEW TIVOLI GO ANDIAMO

Music on the move

This highly portable Bluetooth speaker marks a new departure for Tivoli Audio: it's simple to use, beautifully finished, and proves a fine companion for mobile music

While one could never accuse Tivoli Audio of a lack of originality – this, after all, is the company responsible for reviving the wood-cased 'table radio' – there's something rather familiar about the latest addition to its range. Yes, there are several similar Bluetooth speakers on the market combining aluminium casework and a leather strap – not least from that well-known company located up on the Danish coast – but Tivoli thinks it can draw on its heritage to bring something new to the party.

And that something is the Andiamo speaker, selling for £189 and the first model in a new 'Go' sub-brand, which will offer 'a collection of portable Bluetooth-enabled audio systems designed for easy access to music when on the move'. It's a little larger than some of its rivals at 13.5cm across and 5.5cm deep and the chunky 720g weight gives it a feeling of substance without making it sufficiently heavy to have one wondering whether to take it out and about.

Furthermore, while the features 'arms race' in this sector of the market loads up many a Bluetooth speaker with multiroom capability, microphones for mobile telephony, ports to charge a phone and even lights flashing in time with the music, Tivoli eschews all those fripperies in favour of a very simple philosophy: less frill and more sound.

The Andiamo is charged from a mains power supply provided in the box, its 7.2V/2600mAh Lithium-ion rechargeable battery providing up to 20 hours' play-time between charges, and connects to external devices using Bluetooth 3.0 wireless, with a 3.5mm auxiliary input provided as an option.

Pairing is quick and easy: like the volume up/down and power buttons, the Bluetooth one is embossed into the Italian leather surrounding the aluminium housing, and activates a sensor below the strap, with a flashing blue light turning steady when the link is made. The same LED also pulses red when charging, shows solid red when the battery is low, turns green when fully charged and is yellow when the unit is in standby. Steady purple illumination indicates the Andiamo in line-in mode.

That really is all there is to using the speaker: it can be hung from the strap



TIVOLI GO ANDIAMO

Type Bluetooth speaker
Price £189
Drive unit 2.5in/6.5cm full range, with coaxial 3in/7.5cm passive radiator
Amplifier 20W with DSP equalization
Inputs Bluetooth, 3.5mm stereo line-in
Battery life up to 20 hours
Accessories supplied Mains charger
Finishes Silver/tan or black/black
Dimensions (WxD) 13.5x5.5cm
tivoliaudio.co.uk

when in use, or stand on a surface, with a rubberised ring on the lower surface providing a 'foot'. As we'll see, the speaker sounds best when on a table, but respectable enough for casual listening when free-hanging, at least as long as the grille perforated into the aluminium is kept facing toward the listener.

Within, the Andiamo shows the long-established Tivoli Audio engineering expertise in action. The driver here is a 2.5in/6.5cm full range unit, driven by a high-efficiency 20W amplifier and with a coaxially mounted 3in/7.5cm passive radiator to extend the bass reach. Tuning of the whole audio system is achieved using equalisation implemented in 24-bit digital processing, which Tivoli says enhances both the dynamics of the sound and overall detail.

And that's about it, beyond the fact that the Andiamo is available in a choice of finishes: the fresh, light-looking silver with tan strap of the review sample, or a rather more sombre black on black, perhaps for those who are more bikes and leathers than bicycles with baskets!

PERFORMANCE

Two obvious things to get out of the way: one is that the Tivoli speaker is 'only' mono, having just a single drive unit; the other is that, in general, I really don't like compact Bluetooth speakers, finding their sound flat, dull, and either thin or – when some kind of bass enhancement is employed – clumsily overprocessed.

However, the lack of stereo here proves no great hindrance to enjoyment: whether out and about or just with a speaker parked on a table, it's unlikely one would be able to set things up to achieve a reasonable soundstage were it to be stereo, and those models using processing to achieve some kind of enhanced stereo effect again sound fairly fake to these ears.

Given a speaker with decent tonality and weight – both of which the Andiamo certainly has – it's perhaps surprising how quickly one ignores the lack of stereo effect, and instead concentrates on what's being played or said. Clarity is a major asset the Tivoli speaker has on its side, especially when it comes to the intelligibility of voices spoken and sung, and when that is partnered by the surprising low-end punch and dynamic ability here, that makes for a highly involving sound.

I used the Andiamo with a range of devices, from my iPhone 8 Plus to an inexpensive Android tablet, and from dedicated digital music players through to my desktop Mac mini computer and even an Amazon Echo Dot. In every case I found I was overlooking the limitations of the sound – the treble is a little rolled-off and softened, and of course absolute bass weight is restricted – and 'listening through' to enjoy what was being played or said. At some point I realised that were I only to have my phone running the BBC Sounds app and this speaker, I'm sure I wouldn't feel too hard done by.

Placing the speaker on a table helps the bass through some boundary reinforcement – as I type this I am listening to Radio 3 from my iPhone with the Andiamo between my keyboard and the computer, and I can feel low bass notes through the desk! There's also enough power here to fill a reasonably-sized room without any sense of the amplifier or driver struggling, and even away from the speaker the clarity remains excellent. 

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ESSAY

‘Is it too early for the CD revival?’

The world may be turning to streaming but the CD still has much to offer

As a reviewer of audio equipment, one tends to accumulate all kinds of boxes representing good ideas that never caught on, products overtaken by technology and formats having fallen by the wayside. For example, for a feature I wrote a while back I bought online an example of one of the first cassette recorders I ever owned, one of those Philips models with the ‘T-bar’ selector for play, fast forward and rewind, and loved how simple and direct it was to use.

Meanwhile, in the outbuilding that serves as my ‘deep storage’, for products never used these days but which, you know, may be handy one day, are all kinds of formats from the past: to name but a few, MiniDisc and Digital Compact Cassette recorders, VHS recorders, boxes for long-gone TV services, the odd analogue phone, some old typewriters and word-processors and even a few CD players.

As a teenager of my acquaintance would say, ‘Wait, what?’ – but yes, I have to admit that, with a system these days very much based around streaming music, I can’t remember when – at least outside the constraints of a product review – I actually loaded up a CD to listen.

Oh, a lot of discs still come into the house, both CD and SACD, but almost inevitably they get ripped to the various servers in the backbone of my set up, and then accessed around the house, via main systems or even the odd wireless speakers dotted here and there. Having spent a lot of time investigating various methods to do so, including extensive comparative listening between played and ripped discs, I’m fairly confident that there’s no difference in the sound, and I love the convenience of the ‘swipe, tap’ way of listening.

It certainly serves me well when reviewing, as I can swiftly play through a preloaded list of favourite tracks, either from a server or, when appropriate, a USB stick. In fact, just as I used to way back when, except then it was from a recordable CD, painstakingly put together with the annoyance that if one made an error one had to start again – for some reason, the one-shot CD-Rs always seemed to sound that bit better than their erasable CD-RW counterparts, but that’s a discussion for another time. Like almost a decade ago!

So in the face of downloads and streaming, is it too early for the CD



The flagship Marantz SA-10 SACD/CD player shows a continued commitment to ‘physical media’ – and there are also excellent bargains to be had in both hardware and discs

revival? I think so, but not on the same grounds of nostalgia or superior perceived sound quality that underpinned the vinyl comeback, but rather for more practical reasons – principally cost.

CDs are now where LPs were a few years back, before the much-vaunted vinyl revival took hold

You’d think that, given the removal of the need to produce, package and distribute physical product, downloaded files would be less expensive than their CD equivalents, but some recent experiences have suggested that isn’t the case. Looking for a number of albums, both classical and popular, I found them available on download services, but also – often at considerably lower prices – as CDs, from companies offering next day delivery. That made the discs the obvious buy – after all, a 24-hour wait plus a few minutes spent ripping to my server was hardly any great hardship, and of course I also got a ready-made backup of my files, ready to be put away in storage just in case.

And whether you want to upload your music to a server or just play it, there’s also the small matter of the massive number of CDs sold over the format’s near 40-year life: true, the first ever CD, a Philips release of Arrau playing Chopin waltzes, is something of a collector’s item, and you can expect to pay £20 or more for it, but there are huge numbers of used discs out there, everywhere from specialist used music stores to the likes of jumble sales and car boot sales. With only a quick look online I found the Karajan box-set of Beethoven symphonies for just over £5, the Leipzig/Masur complete Bruch

symphonies for £3.99, and the Royal Opera House/Colin Davis *La bohème* for £3.19.

In other words, CDs are now just about where LPs were a few years back, before the much-vaunted vinyl revival took hold.

CD is also following the vinyl model in that there are high-end players being launched to make the most of the format: here I’m thinking of models such as the flagship Marantz SA-10, Pioneer’s PD-70AE and a very exotic machine from French company Métronome Technologie I recently had through my hands, the £14,500 – yes, you did read that correctly – AQWO. But alongside those machines, there’s no shortage of good CD-playing hardware to be found, from cost-effective new models such as the Denon DCD-800NE and Audiolab 6000CDT reviewed in these pages in recent months through to excellent players of the recent past available on the secondhand market.

While one needs to exercise some caution with more elderly CD hardware, for which spares may not be available, there are some striking bargains out there. For example, good Linn players can now be found for less than £500, Naim CD5s for about the same money, while present-shape Marantz players start at less than £100, and even high-end models such as the CD-17KI are under £500. You can even find very early players such as the Philips CD-101 or Marantz CD-63B for around £400 in fully restored form, if you want to do the whole vintage CD thing.

True, the disc booklets don’t look so impressive up on the wall (which I’m told is part of the appeal of LPs to those rediscovering that format!), but in this download/streaming age, maybe it really is time to take another look at – and listen to – CDs. **G**

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NOTES & LETTERS

The quick wit of André Previn • Previn's Good Companions • In defence of Jeremy Denk

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André Previn's wit

Edward Seckerson's balanced appreciation of André Previn (April, page 10) brought back many memories of this great musician who did much to enhance my appreciation of listening to music, both live and recorded – rarely did a new recording from him receive an unfavourable review.

Previn's wit was embracing, and one of my fondest memories of him was when he brought the LSO to Bradford in December 1978 (a concert switched from Leeds due to the state of their Town Hall roof). Moments before he was due on the podium, a violinist had to leave the stage to replace a broken chair. Unaware of this, Previn came on, took his bow and turned to the orchestra to conduct Rossini's *Italian in Algiers* Overture, at which point leader John Georgiadis alerted him to the fact they were awaiting the return of their colleague. Previn simply turned back to the audience and said 'Do carry on clapping'.

Geoff Bateman
Bradford, W Yorks

Defending Denk

Michelle Assay (March, page 69) calls Jeremy Denk's two-CD recording project 'c.1300-c.2000' 'futile'. That's an astonishing word to use for a linked series of pieces, brilliantly played by one of the finest modern pianists, which relate to each other far more closely than do most recitals of work by different composers. For Assay, Denk's lengthy programme notes consist of 'explanation and "disclaimer"'. She does not tell us that the pianist defines very precisely in them what he is doing, by setting this piece against that. She says that the 'conceptual flaws of the project' are 'glaring' but never actually says what those 'flaws' are – apart from stating that the first disc fails in its attempt to convey the essence of Machaut. It never attempts to do that. Denk does not, either, as Assay suggests, 'fondly imagine' that playing the Binchois piece again at the end shows it 'charged with new meaning'. He says that its medieval sounds feel charged with meaning – which they do – and that the second time around they sound 'newer than they were before'. It's a modest enough

Letter of the Month



Previn's 1974 musical based on the novel by JB Priestley (left) had lyrics by Johnny Mercer (centre)

André Previn's The Good Companions

In his eloquent and wholly justified tribute to André Previn, Edward Seckerson states that 'his shows *Coco* and *The Good Companions* did nothing to advance or redefine the genre (musical theatre) in the way that Bernstein's musicals did'. That may well be true but for my part, as a devotee of both JB Priestley and Previn, I have long cherished the score of *The Good Companions*, even if it does not break new ground. The way in which Previn and his lyricist collaborator Johnny Mercer, two Americans, capture so much of

the essence of this quintessentially English novel, with a touch of Broadway into the bargain, is very much to their credit.

The recording by the original cast, headed by Judi Dench, John Mills and Christopher Gable, is, for me, a constant source of pleasure. Previn did so much for British music and I would suggest that this, now rather forgotten, musical is no less a part of his legacy as his much-praised recordings of Walton and Vaughan Williams.

Michael Nelson
Leeds, Yorks

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claim. Assay, however – who personifies herself as a bored and impatient child – simply wants the recital over. I found the Binchois filled me with an odd combination of nostalgia for a simpler time, and both terror and pride in our development of a wider scope of thinking than was possible for the medieval mind.

Michelle Assay also seems to be too bored and impatient to point out how Denk's extraordinary articulation of Monteverdi's 'Zefiro torna' reveals what a marvellous keyboard composer Monteverdi would have been! Instead she damns Denk for selecting just 'a few works by a few

great white men'. Denk chooses works by no fewer than 22 composers: I'd like to know which black composers she would have preferred for CD 1 (up to Bach). And is there a woman composer from the 19th century better than Schubert – who doesn't appear either?

Jeremy Denk has done something challenging and fascinating; he makes one listen differently, and learn anew; and at times smile with delight. Could there be a better result from 101 minutes of music?

John Worthen
via email

OBITUARIES

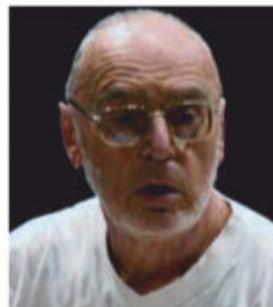
A conductor-composer, a jazz pianist and a record company founder

MICHAEL GIELEN

Conductor and composer

Born July 20, 1927

Died March 8, 2019



The Austrian-German conductor, known for his championing of new music, has died in Mondsee, Austria.

He was born into an artistic family – his father was a theatre and opera director, his mother had been an actress (and her brother was the composer and pianist Eduard Steuermann). After studying piano in Buenos Aires, where he also assisted Erich Kleiber, Karl Böhm and Wilhelm Furtwängler at the Teatro Colón, Gielen joined the Vienna State Opera as a répétiteur and conductor, overseeing numerous new works. From 1960 to 1965, he was a conductor at the Royal Swedish Opera, he then joined Netherlands Oper and Frankfurt Opera (1967-77). In Frankfurt he regularly collaborated with directors like Hans Neufels and Ruth Berghaus (including on a *Ring* cycle).

As a symphonic conductor, he held posts with the Belgian National Orchestra (1969-73), Cincinnati SO (1980-86) and SWR Symphony Baden-Baden and Freiburg (1986-89). He also served as a Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra (1978-81). He retired from conducting in 2014.

His service to contemporary music was immense and he championed works by Ligeti, Stockhausen, Zimmermann, Henze, Jolas, Isang Yun and Pousseur, as well as earlier 20th-century masters.

Thanks to his work with the SWR Symphony Baden-Baden and Freiburg, nearly all his performances were recorded. Rob Cowan has written that 'a Gielen performance is invariably an education. Fastidious attention to detail allied to a composer's architectural instinct hold each favoured piece in unusually clear focus.'

The most recent volume of SWR Music's 'Michael Gielen Edition' (Vol 7, reviewed last September) wonderfully illustrates his eclectic musical tastes and enlightened approach to programming: the composers include Carl Ruggles, Ives, Colin McPhee, Varèse, Steuermann, Janáček, Ravel, Scriabin, Busoni, Petrassi, Puccini, Reger, Schreker, Hindmuth, Richard Strauss, Wagner and Zemlinsky.

As a composer, Gielen revealed his post-Second Viennese School leanings. His String Quartet, *Un vieux souvenir*, after Baudelaire, was premiered by the LaSalle Quartet in 1985.

JACQUES LOUSSIER

Pianist and composer

Born October 26, 1934

Died March 5, 2019



Born in Angers, Loussier studied at the Conservatoire National Musique, and with the pianist Yves Nat. He accompanied many of the great French singers like Charles Aznavour and Léo Ferré, and in 1959, with bassist Pierre Michelot and drummer Christian Garros, formed the Jacques Loussier Trio. Together they attracted a huge following for their jazzed-up versions of Bach's music and would give over 3000 concerts and record numerous albums which sold over seven million copies. As a composer he wrote film scores as well as a Mass: *Lumières: Messe Baroque du 21e Siècle*.

JOHN SHUTTLEWORTH

Founder of Meridian Records

Born October 20, 1921

Died March 6, 2019



John Shuttleworth, whose company Meridian was the first independent to win a Gramophone Award (in 1980, for 'A Shropshire Lad' with Graham Trew and Roger Vignoles) has died at the age of 97. After national service in the Navy, Shuttleworth taught maths at Eltham College, recording on an amateur basis before undertaking professional work for Saga. In 1977, with Francis Loring, Shuttleworth founded Meridian, taking on Ted Perry (who would later found Hyperion) to look after A&R. The label gave many artists – including The Sixteen, the Lindsay Quartet, John Bingham, Ian Partridge and David Sanger – their early breaks and also explored more unusual repertoire. Up until his retirement in 2004, Shuttleworth released over 280 recordings, many of which were praised for their fine sound.

NEXT MONTH

JUNE 2019



Luciano Pavarotti
With Ron Howard's documentary film about the world-famous tenor beginning its release next month in the US, we explore this operatic icon's very finest roles, and recommend the recordings to hear.

Paul McCreesh

The Gabrieli Consort and Players' Artistic Director tells us about the role music plays in the grandeur of a coronation, the subject of their new album

Ockeghem's Requiem
Early Music expert Fabrice Fitch listens to recordings of the oldest surviving setting of the Requiem Mass, and names his favourites

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CD & SACD

ABC CLASSICS

Westlake Spirit of the Wild Reich Desert Music. Synergy Vocals/ Sydney SO/Westlake/Robertson. (F) ABC481 7899

ACCENTUS

Bach, JS Cantatas Nos 19, 149, 158 & 169. Sols/Gaechinger Cantorey/Rademann. (F) ACC30466

Various Cpsrs Concert-centenaire. Ingolfsson/Stoupe. (M) (3) (R) ACC80371

AEOLUS

Cabezón Tientos, diferencias y glosadas. Berben. (F) (SACD) AE11171

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Debussy, Ravel, Tailleferre Stg Qts. Stenhammar Qt. (F) (SACD) ABCD431

Heiniö, Kilpinen Songs. Luttinen/Hällstöm. (F) ABCD427

Schumann Vn Sons. Maalismaa/Holmström. (F) ABCD438

Various Cpsrs Tango Ladeado - Wks for Accordion & Vc. Rättyä/Demenga. (F) ABCD441

Various Cpsrs Momentum - Wks for Fl & Org. Nygård/Burgmann. (F) ABCD439

ALTO

Janáček Sinfonietta. Taras Bulba. Op Preludes (r1960-62). Pro Arte Orch/Mackerras/Czech PO/Ančerl. (S) (R) ALC1380

Shostakovich Syms Nos 9 & 15 (r1973/83). Moscow PO/Kondrashin/USSR SO/Rozhdestvensky. (S) (R) ALC1362

Tchaikovsky Syms Nos 4-6 (r1960-61). Leningrad PO/Mravinsky. (S) (2) (R) ALC1603

Vivaldi Four Seasons (r1985-86). Laredo/SCO. (S) (R) ALC1383

Various Cpsrs Bawdy Ballads of Old England (r1996). City Waites/Skeaping. (S) (R) ALC1382

Various Cpsrs In Concert. Björling. (S) (H) ALC1397

Various Cpsrs Org Classics (r1993). Cleobury. (S) (R) ALC1401

ANTARCTICA

Various Cpsrs Insight Your Inside - Pf Wks. Swerts. (B) (2) ARO13

APR

Various Cpsrs Cpte Brunswick & Electrola 78rpm Recs (r1922-38). Ney. (B) (3) (H) APR7311

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Bessonov, Chopin Pf Wks. Bessonov. (F) (SACD) ARS38 277

Chopin, Field, Pleyel Pf Wks. Manukyan. (F) (SACD) ARS38 828

Chopin, Liszt, Scarlatti, D Si! - Pf Sons. Gomez-Tagle. (F) (SACD) ARS38 270

Debussy, Mussorgsky, Schumann Pf Wks. Koryakin. (F) ARS38 556

Field, Pleyel Pf Wks. Jáuregi. (F) ARS38 558

Gulda, Shostakovich Wks for Vc & Orch. Kleinapl/Vienna Concert Verein/Pichlmayer. (F) (SACD) ARS38 272

Hovhaness, Kernis Western Moods. Ens Esperanza. (F) (SACD) ARS38 274

Kverno, Sisask Scandinavian Chor Wks. Amadeus Ch/Matt. (F) ARS38 449

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Tchaikovsky Pf Son. Seasons. Margolina. (F) (SACD) ARS38 273

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Various Cpsrs Sons for Two Vns. Ens Diderot/Pramsohler. (F) ADX13714

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Schumann Cpte Pf Trios. Horszowski Trio. (M) (2) AV2405

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Haapanen Reports - Chor Wks. Helsinki Chbr Ch/Schweckendiek. (F) BIS2452

Pettersson Vn Conc No 2. Sym No 17. Wallin/Norrköping SO/Lindberg, C. (F) (SACD) BIS2290

Saint-Saëns Pf Concs Nos 3-5. Kantorow, A/Tapiola Sinfonietta/Kantorow, J-J. (F) (SACD) BIS2300

Various Cpsrs Pf Wks. Çakmur. (F) (SACD) BIS2430

CANTALOUPE

Dennehy Last Hotel. Sols/Crash Ens/Pierson. (F) CA21143

Weiser and all the days were purple. Bagg/Dionne/Bernardo/Levinson/Collins/Compitello. (F) CA21147

CAPRICCIO

von Einem Prozess. Sols/ORF Vienna RSO/Gruber. (B) (2) C5358

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Schulz, Weyse Wks for Hammerflügel. Schornsheim. (F) C5363

Weigl Sym No 1. Bilder und Geschichten. Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz/Bruns. (F) C5365

Various Cpsrs Sacred Chor Wks. Vienna Boys' Ch. (S) (7) (R) C7317

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Schütz Madrigals & Wedding Wks. Mields/Dresden Chbr Ch/Rademann. (F) CARUS83 277

Various Cpsrs Hallelujah: Gospels & Spirituals. European Chbr Ch/Reif. (F) CARUS210 499

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Bach, JS Kybd Partitas, BWV825-830. Telner. (B) (2) CRC3642

Brahms German Requiem (London Version). Te Deum/Shepard. (F) CRC3647

Dall'Abaco 11 Capricci. Rasmussen. (F) CRC3649

Singelée Op Fantasies for Vn & Pf, Vol 2. Wood/Dykstra. (F) CRC3583

Various Cpsrs Nasty Women: Pf Wks in the Age of Women's Suffrage. Goldstein. (F) CRC3631

CHALLENGE CLASSICS

Martinsson Garden of Devotion. Larsson/Netherlands CO/Nikolitch. (F) (SACD) CC72754

CHANDOS

Elgar Stg Qt. Pf Qnt. Roscoe/Brodsky Qt. (F) CHAN10980

Grieg Chor Wks. Edvard Grieg Ch. (F) (SACD) CHSA5232

Strauss, R Burleske. Vn Conc. Orch Wks. Little/McHale/BBC SO/Collins. (F) CHAN20034

Various Cpsrs Cembalo transalpino from the Fitzwilliam Collection. Yates. (F) CHANO819

CLAUDIO

Dodgson Pf Trios. Bagatelles (r2002). Roberts Pf Trio. (F) CC5257-2

CORO

Various Cpsrs 40th Anniversary Collection. Sixteen/Christophers. (B) (2) (R) COR16172

COVIELLO

Peranda Sacred Wks from Basel. Abendmusiken Basel/Bötticher. (F) (SACD) COV91904

Verdi Lombardi. Sols/Cappella Aquileia/Bosch. (F) (2) (SACD) COV91901

CPO

Alfvén Sym Wks, Vol 2. Deutsches SO Berlin/Borowicz. (F) (2) (SACD) CPO555 237-2

Keiser Blutige und sterbende Jesus. Sols/Capella Thuringia/Klappröt. (F) (2) (SACD) CPO555 259-2

Loewe Grand Trio. Chbr Wks. Henning/Kratz/Eckels/Kuchenbuch/Siebold. (F) (2) (SACD) CPO555 256-2

Offenbach Folies symphoniques. Ovs. Brandenburg St Orch/Frankfurt/Griffiths, H. (F) (2) (SACD) CPO555 275-2

Schneider Weltgericht. Sols/Camerata Lipsiensis/Meyer. (F) (2) (SACD) CPO555 119-2

Strauss II, J/Korngold Nacht in Venedig. Sols/Graz PO/Burkert. (F) (2) (SACD) CPO555 235-2

DABRINGHAUS UND GRIMM

Bach, JS St Mark Passion. Cantorey St Catharinen Orch/Fischer, A. (F) (2) (SACD) MDG902 2104-6

Beethoven Egmont. Brandt/Bezsmertna/Beethoven Orch/Bonn/Kaftan. (F) (2) (SACD) MDG937 2111-6

Brahms, Schumann, C & R Widmung - Wks for Ob & Pf. Sournatcheva/Shakin. (F) (2) (SACD) MDG903 2073-6

Chopin Late Pf Wks, Vol 2. Jin. (F) (2) (SACD) MDG947 2088-6

Guillou Org Wks, Vol 1. Ferjenčíková. (F) (2) (SACD) MDG906 2089-6

Klingler Vn Conc. Va Son. Hoelscher/Raucheisen/BPO/Schmidt-Gertenbach. (F) (2) (SACD) MDG642 2103-2

Mahler Sym No 5 (arr for Pf Duet). Trenkner/Speidel. (F) (2) (SACD) MDG930 2070-6

Weckmann Org Wks. Kesphol. (F) (2) (SACD) MDG906 2109-6

Various Cpsrs Futurism & Early Italian Avantgarde - Pf Wks. Schleiermacher. (F) (2) (SACD) MDG613 2112-2

Various Cpsrs Légende - Wks for Sax & Pf. Laznik/Horvat. (F) (2) (SACD) MDG903 2097-6

DACAPO

Kuhlau Vn Sons, Vol 2. Duo Åstrand/Salo. (F) 8 226083

Kuhlau, Malling Pf Qts. Copenhagen Pf Qt. (F) 6 220591

DANACORD

Various Cpsrs Berlin Recs (r1928-43). Brailowsky. (S) (4) (H) DACOCD336/9

DECCA

Bowman, C Real & Right & True - Songs. Macliver/McMahon/Richardson. (F) (2) 481 7051

Debussy, Ravel Stg Qts. Tinalley Qt. (F) 481 6906

Various Cpsrs Home - Wks for Sop & Orch. Bradman/Adelaide SO/Dollman. (F) 481 6564

DELOS

Bates Mass Transmission - Chor Wks. Cappella SF/Bohlin. (F) DE3573

Brahms, Golijov, Piazzolla Tribute to Danny Granados - Wks for Cl & Stgs. Granados/Fidelis Qt. (F) DE3562

Danielpour, Kernis, Shickele Spring Forward - Wks for Cl & Stg Qt. Shifrin/M

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Handel. Scarlatti, D Vn Sons (r c1955). Olevsky.	
	Ⓜ ③ ⓘ DHR8074/6
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Various Cpsrs Affetti barocchi: Arias & Laments in 17th Century Italy. <i>Di Laccio/Capela Strumentale/Cordella</i> .	ⓘ DRAMA006
DREYER GAIDO	
Azmech Uneven Sky. Azmech/Ma/Deutsches SO Berlin/Nawri.	ⓘ ② DGCD2114
DYNAMIC	dynamic.it
Bach, JS Six Trio Sons, BWV525-530. <i>Extravagantia Trio</i> .	ⓘ CDS7839
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Bach, JS Six Cantatas. ASMF/Marriner.	ⓘ ② ⓘ ELQ482 9722
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Wagner Götterdämmerung (pp1956). <i>Sols incl Flagstad/Oslo PO/Svanholm</i> .	ⓘ ④ ⓘ ELQ482 8809
Wagner Tristan und Isolde (r1980-81). <i>Sols incl Mitchinson & Gray/WNO/Goodall</i> .	ⓘ ④ ⓘ ELQ482 9496
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FRYDERYK CHOPIN INSTITUTE	nifc.pl
Chopin Pf Conc No 1 (pp1984). <i>Poblocka/Warsaw PO/Kord</i> .	ⓘ NIFCCD054
Chopin Pf Wks (1849 Érard). <i>Ohlsson</i> .	ⓘ NIFCCD049
Chopin Pf Wks (Modern Pf). <i>Ohlsson</i> .	ⓘ NIFCCD219
GENUIN	genuin.de
Bach, JS. Bartók. Ben-Haim Refuge - Solo Vn Wks. <i>Migdal</i> .	ⓘ GEN19656
Enescu Wks for Vn & Pf. <i>Duo Brüggen-Plank</i> .	ⓘ GEN19642
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GOD RECORDS	godrec.com
Kajkut III. <i>Kajkut</i> .	ⓘ ② ⓘ GOD53
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Various Cpsrs Travels in my Homeland - Portuguese Pf Wks. <i>Gama</i> .	ⓘ GP792
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Various Cpsrs Im Treibhaus. <i>Håkon Kornstad Trio</i> .	ⓘ GRCD4603
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Mahler. Schumann. Wolf Lieder. <i>Prégardien, C/Gees</i> .	ⓘ ② ⓘ HC19006
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HARMONIA MUNDI	harmoniamundi.com
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Doyle Heresy Ostraca. <i>Doyle</i> .	ⓘ HERESY023
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Bairstow. Harris. Stanford Chor Wks. <i>Westminster Abbey Ch/O'Donnell</i> .	ⓘ CDA68259
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Saint-Saëns Sym No 2. <i>Urbs Roma. Utah SO/Fischer, T</i> .	ⓘ CDA68212
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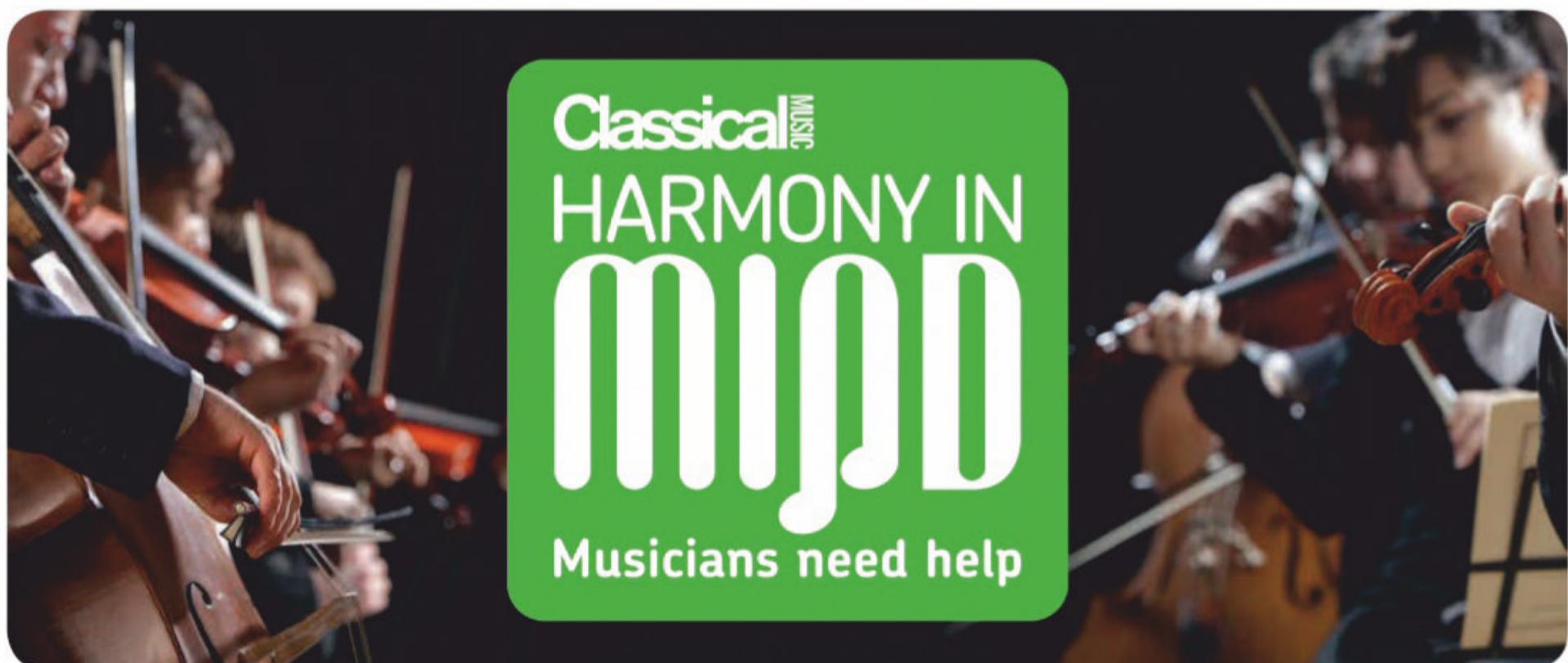
Classical MUSIC

Harmony in Mind campaign

To help tackle the growing mental health crisis in the classical music industry, *Classical Music* is launching a new campaign to support musicians and lead the way in securing better mental health provision across the sector.

The campaign will:

- Encourage organisations to sign up to the Time to Change employers' pledge
- Share best practice, new research, advice and resources for musicians
- Recognise outstanding work in the field by introducing an annual award and hosting an event at the Royal Opera House for World Mental Health Day



A recent study conducted by Help Musicians UK found that



71%

of respondents experienced anxiety and panic attacks



65%

reported they had suffered from depression

To find out more and how you can help, visit
WWW.RHINEGOLD.CO.UK/HARMONYINMIND

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James Mayhew

The children's author and illustrator on the enduring power of record sleeves and the drama of 'live-drawing' music

My parents had a few records at home, and I was really drawn to the artwork on the covers. The one that really started me off was a cover for *Sheherazade* by Rimsky-Korsakov with an illustration by Edmund Dulac – it was such a beautiful illustration, I wanted to know what was happening on that record. I remember playing it over and over and over. As I got older I realised that Rimsky-Korsakov had wanted it to be quite an ambiguous suite, he didn't want it to be too specific – but back then I wanted to know everything about it, what each bar meant, and of course there isn't an answer to that – which is rather exciting in a way because it means you keep on exploring. I started to collect many editions of *The Arabian Nights*, and to fall in love with the illustrations for them. When I was a student I even did a thesis on Islamic art, just because of Rimsky-Korsakov.

Then I started to explore his other suites, most of which are based on legends, myths and fairy tales. And other Russian composers, because they were real experts of pictorial music – it fascinated me that music could tell stories so clearly, and with such colour; it was a wonderful world to inhabit. I then became fascinated with the set designs for the Russian operas, and in that whole period in music and art history.

I designed a production of *Noye's Fludde* for the Cheltenham Music Festival in the Britten centenary year, which was lovely as I have associations with Britten and his birthplace Lowestoft. My parents had known him – as children they played in the streets together. I even went to the Benjamin Britten High School at one point. Once, Lowestoft Library had a big sale of *Gramophone* magazines, and I bought hundreds of copies going back to the 1950s – it has absolutely been the bible of my music education.

Many years ago I produced a book of Russian tales, partly inspired by all the music that I'd grown up with, and I was going to festivals and telling the stories (and when I tell stories I tend to draw at the same time). And one day the organisers said: 'All you need now is the music – and we know an orchestra in Hertfordshire who are looking to do some kind of family concert. How about it?' So we tried it, projecting my illustrations onto a big screen – though I soon realised my usual filigree pen and ink was not going to work, so I had to develop a completely different way of creating art. I realised I had to leave my ego at the stage door: what I was doing was selling the music to the children, not demonstrating myself as an artist – obviously I still wanted the paintings to be beautiful, but some of the pieces of music are short; if you're painting the wild asses in *Carnival of the Animals* you've only got one minute, it's quick! *The Firebird*

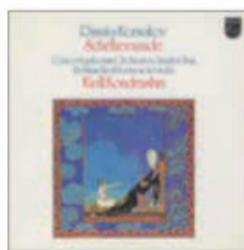


THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Rimsky-Korsakov *Sheherazade*

Herman Krebbers *vn* Concertgebouw Orchestra / Kirill Kondrashin Decca (11/80)

'It's music about the greatest story-teller that ever lived – what could be better?'

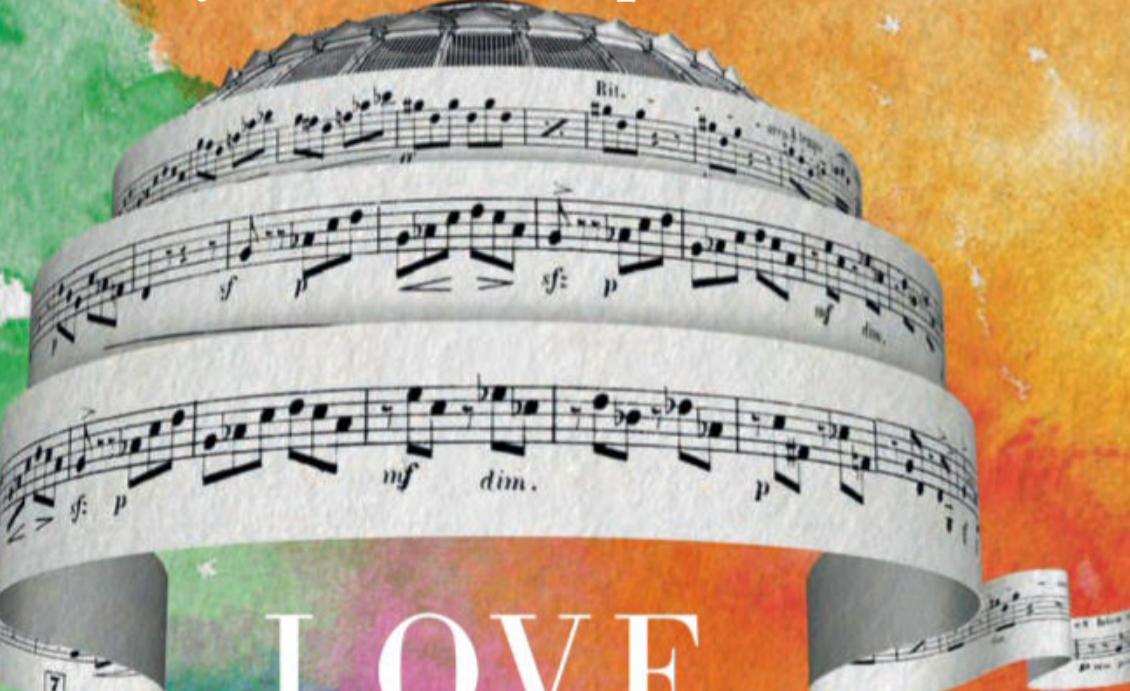


was more sumptuous. I painted on black canvases, the theatre was all blacked out, and it looked really dramatic, these bright colours just appearing to the music.

What I'm trying to do comes, I suppose, under the general umbrella of music education – and we all know how that's suffering at the moment. But it's not just about children learning to read music or to play an instrument, which of course is important – it's also about teaching children to be part of an audience: yes, you can give them a recorder and teach them to play a tune, but are they falling in love with music? A very small percentage of children learning to play an instrument are going to carry that forward into adult life professionally, but anybody can be part of an audience. That's what I'm trying to encourage. **G**

James Mayhew illustrates 'Peter and the Wolf' at Turner Sims, Southampton, on June 9

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